

Griggs, Jennifer Fiona (2015) Epistemological dialogue with aspects of the Western discipline of the study of mysticism as it relates to Barhebraeus in conversation with al-Ghazālī on the question of the 'Concept of God'. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London

<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/23669>

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners.

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

When referring to this thesis, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given e.g. AUTHOR (year of submission) "Full thesis title", name of the School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

**Epistemological dialogue with  
aspects of the Western discipline  
of the study of mysticism  
as it relates to Barhebraeus in  
conversation with al-Ghazālī  
on the question of the  
‘Concept of God’**

Jennifer Fiona Griggs

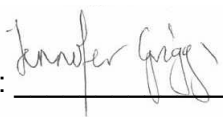
Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2014

Department of Study of Religions  
SOAS, University of London

### **Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis**

I have read and understood regulation 17.9 of the Regulations for students of the SOAS, University of London concerning plagiarism. I undertake that all the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 16/08/15

## Acknowledgements

My supervisory committee has given me invaluable advice and guidance in the preparation for and completion of my doctoral studies over these four years, Dr Cosimo Zene, Dr Peter Hartung, and especially my principal supervisor Dr Erica C D Hunter. The inspiration for my PhD began with my masters at SOAS in 2008-09, and the Mysticism in the Great Traditions course convened by Dr Cosimo Zene (and Dr Tullio Lobetti). Without Cosimo's encouragement to pursue my own studies in mysticism and his enthusiasm for Michel de Certeau, my doctoral thesis would not have come about.

My involvement with the Samvada Centre for Research Resources has similarly been invaluable for my engagement with dialogical hermeneutics in the development of a methodology for my thesis. I would like to give special mention to Dr Brainerd Prince, for all our conversations over the past few years and for introducing me to the Samvada tradition of hermeneutics.

I am grateful to the AHRC for their support of my second and third years of study, and to the Spalding Trust for contributing towards the expenses of my first and my fourth year, and to my Arabic studies in Syria prior to commencing the PhD. Dr Atef Alshaer has also helped me greatly with Arabic, especially the nuances of translation. Professor Sebastian Brock, whose insights I have benefitted from greatly, also allowed me to join his Greek and Syriac Reading Class at the Warburg Institute in 2010-11.

Getting published with the Journal of OCMS, *Transformation*, allowed me to further engage with the role of dialogue in Christian apologetics, and I'm very grateful to the Editor Dr David Singh, Research Tutor at OCMS, for accepting my contribution to their special issue on Christian-Muslim relations. With thanks also to Dr Richard Shumack at *RZIM*, for his informative feedback on this piece. Presenting at Dr Erica Hunter's *Christianity in Iraq X* seminar day at SOAS, was another excellent opportunity to present my research and benefit from the response of both specialists and non-specialists alike.

Finally, I must express my deep appreciation of the continued support of my family throughout the duration of my studies, my aunts for their sustained interest in my work and my mum for her endless patience.

## Abstract

This thesis examines Barhebraeus' contribution to the medieval Syrian Christian discourse on the concept of God, concerning his understanding of the ontology of God through the love of God. Barhebraeus' thinking can contribute to the understanding of God presupposed in the contemporary western academic study of mysticism. Both the medieval Syrian tradition and the modern study of mysticism reach an impasse in the discourse about God due to the conflict between two rival epistemologies. In response to the epistemological impasse, Barhebraeus turns to insights from al-Ghazālī on the understanding of God based on the love of God, to critique the metaphysical background of the thinking which Syrian hermeneutics inherited from the Greeks. The main texts used for the argument of this thesis are the *Book of the Dove* and the *Ethicon*, which reveal the development of Barhebraeus' main theme and his resolution of the impasse in the Syrian tradition. The academic discipline of mysticism is brought into dialogue with this contribution to Syrian hermeneutics, so that Barhebraeus' mysticism is shown to make a methodological contribution in resolving the epistemological basis of the conflict over the intentionality of mystical consciousness in the contemporary study of mysticism. This conflict is between two main schools of thought, objectivist and relativist, which inform the metaphysical presuppositions of both approaches to the study of mysticism, based on a materialist and essentialist view of religion. Barhebraeus' mysticism is shown to resolve the substantive problem of making metaphysical assertions concerning transcendence in the study of mysticism, through his understanding of the love of God which overcomes the concept of God derived from metaphysics. Barhebraeus' mysticism thus goes beyond both the classical approach to the study of mysticism and the relativist critique, to provide a hermeneutical understanding of the claims of mystic discourse.

## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<b>CHAPTER 2: A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FOR THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF MYSTICISM .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Background to the Debate.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>ENLIGHTENMENT OBJECTIVISM.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Sociology and Explanation .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Mysticism and the Psychology of Religion .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Experience of the Sacred.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Perennialism and the Spiritual Consciousness.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Descriptive Phenomenologies.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>GENEALOGICAL CRITIQUE OF OBJECTIVIST APPROACHES.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Constructivism and the Mediation of Experience .....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Epistemologies of Experience in Anglo-American Philosophy .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FOR THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>The Linguistic Genealogy of la mystique .....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>From Mystical Experience to Mystic Tradition .....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Mysticism in Syriac Studies.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<b>CHAPTER 3: LOCATING BARHEBRAEUS HISTORICALLY – TRADITIONS, TEXTS AND THEMES .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY .....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Biographical Sources for Barhebraeus .....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Ecumenical Relations with the East Syrians.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>BARHEBRAEUS' CONTRIBUTION TO A SYRIAC REVIVAL.....</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>The Revival of Philosophy and the Notion of a 'Renaissance'.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Rationale to Barhebraeus' Literary Activities.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>BARHEBRAEUS' ENGAGEMENT WITH GREEK PHILOSOPHY.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Barhebraeus' Philosophical Works.....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>The Problem with the Aristotelian Physics and the Metaphysics .....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Neoplatonic and Aristotelian Cosmology.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Eternity of the Cosmos and the Doctrine of Creation.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>THE CONFLICT OF THINKING IN SYRIAN HERMENEUTICS.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>The Centrality of Aristotelian logic .....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>The West Syrian Monastic Curriculum.....</i>	<i>84</i>
<i>The Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Qennešre.....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>The East Syrian Scholastic Tradition: the School versus the Monastery.....</i>	<i>89</i>

<b>CHAPTER 4: BARHEBRAEUS' MYSTICISM OF THE LOVE OF GOD .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>THE TEXTS OF BARHEBRAEUS' MYSTICISM.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Categorisation of Barhebraeus' Mystical Texts.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>An Overview of the Mystical Texts of Barhebraeus: Editions and Contents.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>The Monastic Sources for Barhebraeus' Spiritual Works.....</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>The Syrian Dionysian Tradition.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND NEOPLATONIC CONTEMPLATION .....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>THE ONTOLOGY OF THE LOVE OF GOD .....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>The Divine Spark of Love .....</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>The Divine Dwelling.....</i>	<i>120</i>
<i>THE DIVINE NAME OF THE GOOD.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>The Vision of the Divine Beauty.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Unification of the Mind with the Good.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<b>CHAPTER 5: BARHEBRAEUS IN DIALOGUE WITH ISLAMIC TRADITION.....</b>	<b>136</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION.....</i>	<i>136</i>
<i>The Epistemological Impasse within the Syrian Tradition .....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>RIVAL CONCEPTUAL SCHEMAS.....</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>The Problem of Conceptual Language for God .....</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Barhebraeus in Epistemological Crisis.....</i>	<i>146</i>
<i>The Idolatry of the Concept.....</i>	<i>149</i>
<i>FROM EPISTEMOLOGY TO ONTOLOGY.....</i>	<i>152</i>
<i>Love as a Consequence of Sensory and Intellectual Perception .....</i>	<i>152</i>
<i>The Knowledge of God as a Cause of the Love of God.....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>The Development of the Evagrian Tradition .....</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>The Conception of God as the Love of God .....</i>	<i>159</i>
<i>THE FIVE CAUSES OF LOVE.....</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>From Love of Self to the Love of God.....</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>Love of the Good .....</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>Love of Inward and Outward Beauty.....</i>	<i>168</i>
<i>The Soul as the Image of God.....</i>	<i>169</i>
<i>METAPHYSICS AND THE LOVE OF GOD .....</i>	<i>172</i>
<i>The Problem of Onto-theology in Syriac Scholasticism.....</i>	<i>172</i>
<i>The Necessary Existent and/or the Good .....</i>	<i>177</i>
<i>The Ontological Love of the Avicennan Tradition.....</i>	<i>180</i>
<i>The Ontology of the Gift of Love .....</i>	<i>182</i>
<b>CHAPTER 6: SYRIAN HERMENEUTICS AND THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF MYSTICISM.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPASSE IN THE ACADEMY .....</i>	<i>187</i>
<i>Epistemology and the Intentionality of Consciousness .....</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>THE PROBLEM OF 'GOD' IN THE STUDY OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE .....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>The Subject-Object Distinction in the Epistemology of Mystical Experience.....</i>	<i>195</i>
<i>The Metaphysical Critique in Mystic Discourse .....</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>Ineffability and the Problem of Language .....</i>	<i>203</i>

<i>THE CONTRIBUTION OF SYRIAN HERMENEUTICS.....</i>	<i>206</i>
<i>A Similar Epistemological Impasse.....</i>	<i>207</i>
<i>Barhebraeus' Epistemological Conflict.....</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>Resolving the Impasse between Rival Epistemologies.....</i>	<i>212</i>
<i>METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDY OF MYSTICISM.....</i>	<i>215</i>
<i>The Path to Thinking.....</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>Language and Metaphysical Thought.....</i>	<i>225</i>
<i>The Spirit Speaks in the Gift.....</i>	<i>233</i>
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: CHRONOLOGY OF BARHEBRAEUS' WORKS.....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2: WORKS CITED OF BARHEBRAEUS.....</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS .....</b>	<b>250</b>
<i>Syriac Terms.....</i>	<i>250</i>
<i>Greek Terms .....</i>	<i>252</i>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>254</b>



## Chapter 1: Introduction

The mysticism of Barhebraeus is brought into dialogue with the Western discipline of the study of mysticism in order to demonstrate how his resolution of the epistemological impasse in Syrian hermeneutics over the 'Concept of God' may be extended to that which divides the modern academic study of mysticism, and to further the understanding of the structure of epistemological inquiry within ontological hermeneutics.

Thus the central argument of the thesis concerns three main areas that are developed through the chapters, in terms of how they contribute to the concept of God. These areas consist of the following:

1. Barhebraeus' understanding of the ontology of God through the love of God
2. The mystical 'experience' and the metaphysics of intentionality
3. The role of dialogue for the hermeneutical study of mysticism

The first area involves exploring the significance of the love of God in Barhebraeus' mystical texts, the *Book of the Dove* and the *Ethicon*, with a view to understanding the nature of the ontology of God in the mysticism of Barhebraeus (1226-1286CE). The insights gained from these texts serve to substantially revise the onto-theological discourse that arises from his other works of a theological or philosophical nature. Therefore, his mystical texts cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of his literary output, since they represent the conclusion of his thinking on divine metaphysics. This part of the argument is outlined in Chapter 3 and developed through Chapters 4 and 5, but the methodological framework is set up in Chapter 2 and then reprised in Chapter 6. This framework is based on the discourse about God in the academic study of mysticism, particularly the mystical experience and the intentionality of this experience in terms of its subject-object structure. The monistic and theistic positions adopted within the study of mysticism presuppose, either positively or negatively, an ontology of God, and thus the intentionality of the religious or mystical experience rests on metaphysical presuppositions. The second area then provides the connection between the concern of Barhebraeus with the ontology of

God, and the arguments within the study of mysticism concerning the intentionality of the mystical consciousness. These arguments are resolved by turning to the mysticism of Barhebraeus, not as an object of academic study but as a tradition of thinking which can make a contribution to modern debates about the role of transcendence in religious experience. This dialogical aspect of the thesis constitutes the third area of argumentation, which is the methodological contribution of a hermeneutical approach to the academic study of mysticism.

Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God is thus brought into dialogue with modern debates in order to make a methodological and substantive contribution to the study of mysticism. The methodological contribution of Barhebraeus' mysticism resolves the epistemological conflict over the intentionality of consciousness that exists between the rival approaches in the study of mysticism. The substantive contribution involves the problem of metaphysical assertions about transcendence, which forms a similar problematic for Syrian hermeneutics as it does in the contemporary debates of religious studies. Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God overcomes the concept of God derived from metaphysics, to go beyond the essentialist and materialist presuppositions about transcendence in the classical and constructivist approaches to the study of mysticism.<sup>1</sup>

## Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 2 begins with the premise that Barhebraeus' meditational thinking about God is contained in texts which have been categorised as 'mystical' within Syriac studies. This categorisation locates these texts of Barhebraeus within another academic discourse, the

---

<sup>1</sup> This thesis does not explore the substantial body of literature on the theology of mysticism in Eastern Christian traditions. This literature includes the classic collection, *La Mystique et les Mystiques*, (éd) Andre Ravier (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965), and the works of those who engage directly with Eastern Christianity – Thomas T, Špidlík, "La Spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien. Manuel systématique", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 206 (Roma, 1978); Thomas Špidlík, "La Spiritualité de l'Orient Chrétien. II: La prière", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 230 (Roma, 1988); Irénée Hausherr, "Études de spiritualité orientale", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 183 (Roma, 1969); I. Hausherr, "La direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 144 (Roma, 1956). For my discussion of Hausherr's estimation of the composition of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, see the section on The Syrian Dionysian Tradition in Chapter 4.

Western discipline of studying mysticism, and thus projects the theoretical assumptions from the modern study of mysticism onto Barhebraeus' texts. In order to study the 'mystical' texts of Barhebraeus and assess the contribution of his 'mystic' discourse to Syrian tradition, the presuppositions of the modern study of mysticism must first be considered in relation to the thinking of Barhebraeus. Therefore this thesis begins with an analysis of the problematic within the Western study of mysticism, in order to construct a middle path between the rival methodological approaches in this discipline, characterised as that of Enlightenment Objectivism and Genealogical Critique. For the study of mysticism to progress beyond the impasse of relativism and essentialism, which represent rival epistemological approaches to the object of its study, a more hermeneutical approach is required. In taking this approach, the academic study of mysticism is understood as the study of traditions of inquiry about the relation of man to God, but these traditions are internally differentiated. The academic discipline is a tradition which can be informed by the other, through engagement with other mystical traditions, to allow for the revision of its own understanding of mysticism. This dialogue of traditions is instigated with an initial investigation into the approaches that have been taken within Syriac studies to the mystical texts of the Syrian monastics.

Chapter 3 proceeds with a historical overview of Barhebraeus' main texts and the main themes which arise from them. The themes pursued in Barhebraeus' mysticism emerge from the mapping of his literary works, in order to understand their central concerns. This survey of his main themes leads to the problematic that Barhebraeus identified within the traditions that he inherited. Barhebraeus engaged in the central epistemological debates of the Syrian tradition, and his writings present and reformulate the intellectual issues that had preoccupied his predecessors. The first part of this chapter contains a Critical Biography of Barhebraeus in order to trace the traditions which informed his literary and ecclesiastical career. The internal evidence of his texts indicate how Barhebraeus saw his works as contributing to West Syrian literary culture, a world which was informed by a variety of intellectual traditions, including the Greek and the Islamic. These texts also reflect Barhebraeus' personal involvement with his cultural environment as Maphrian of the eastern provinces, and thus details of his interaction with the leading political and

ecclesiastical figures of his day, are used to contextualise his literary works. The selective overview of the biographical sources for Barhebraeus' life, examines his interaction with the East Syrians on a number of different levels, especially inter-confessional relations and use of philosophical materials. Barhebraeus' particular contribution to Syrian hermeneutics is located in terms of his engagement with the Peripatetic tradition of Aristotle, and similarly, in his immersion in Syrian monastic spirituality. The interconnection of these apparently antipathetic disciplines is explored in more detail through the perspective of understanding the Syrian monasteries as centres of learning, whose educative curricula defined both the scholastic and mystic orientations. The tension between the school and the monastery amongst the East Syrians provides a backdrop to the epistemological tensions evident in Barhebraeus' own texts.

Chapter 4 explores the main theme of Barhebraeus' mysticism, the love of God, in terms of its background in Syrian monastic spirituality. Alongside the key themes and influences on Barhebraeus' mysticism, the academic scholarship on his mystical texts is considered in terms of the critical editions of the Syriac texts and translations that have been published in Syriac studies. The categorisation of these texts by scholars as mystical is elaborated according to Barhebraeus' stated intentions for these texts and the literary genres to which these writings make reference. The Syrian Dionysian tradition is identified as key to Barhebraeus' understanding of the love of God, with the West Syrian transmission of the writings of Stephen bar Šūdhailē and Pseudo-Dionysius. Barhebraeus' mysticism is shown to mediate between the theological principles derived from Greek metaphysics, that of Aristotle's Highest Being and Plato's Highest Good. Barhebraeus' emphasis on the Spirit surpasses these polarised positions concerning the ontology of God, and revives the importance of revelation in Syrian hermeneutics. The ecumenical aspect to Barhebraeus' mysticism is apparent with his incorporation of John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi*.

Chapter 5 builds specifically on the conflict of thinking between scholastic learning and the contemplative disciplines of the mystics. This conflict was outlined at the end of Chapter 3 in terms of its historical formation and crystallisation in the educative curricula of the East and West Syrians. The characterisation of this conflict as an epistemological impasse, with

its roots in the late antique philosophical tradition of Alexandria, is explored in more depth here. The substantive problem in this Syrian impasse is identified as that of forming an appropriate conceptual language for God. The Evagrian critique of onto-theological discourse is shown to have a profound impact on the thinking of Barhebraeus, whose personal epistemological crisis mirrors that of the wider epistemological conflict between scholastics and mystics. The connection between epistemology and ontology is explored in terms of how the epistemological frameworks inherited from Greek philosophy led to rival conceptions of the ontology of God. Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God overcame the epistemological debate by shifting the focus from knowledge to love, and the ontology established by the love of God. Barhebraeus borrowed from al-Ghazālī's understanding of the love of God through the five causes of love, in his resolution of the Syrian impasse. His dialogue with al-Ghazālī is further considered according to his departure from the Avicennan tradition of metaphysics, in which the love of God remains within the delimitations of an onto-theological discourse. This break with onto-theology in Barhebraeus' mystical texts is epitomised by his concept of the Spirit as that which gives, and the model of the gift.

Chapter 6 returns to the theoretical formulation of taking a hermeneutical approach to mysticism outlined in Chapter 2. This approach begins with a focus on the foundations of academic inquiry, to acknowledge that any academic study is embedded in a tradition which contains its own epistemological and methodological presuppositions about the object and the nature of its study. These presuppositions, understood as 'fore-projections' and as 'prejudice' in the ontological tradition of philosophical hermeneutics, are formative for that inquiry and yet are open to reinterpretation and revision when they become inadequate to their object of study. The Western academic study of mysticism can become a more reflective discipline that is able to incorporate the insights offered by mystical traditions in two inter-related areas:

- i) the substantive issue of the relation of man to God
- ii) the methodological issue of how this relation may be studied, in terms of the explanatory structures of interpretation that mystical traditions provide.

Therefore Chapter 6 is divided two-fold, with the first part concerned with the epistemological impasse in the study of mysticism and the possibilities for its resolution in the encounter of Barhebraeus' mysticism with a similar epistemological impasse in the Syrian tradition. The second part of the chapter deals with the methodological contribution that an understanding of Barhebraeus' mysticism can make to the dialogical method proposed for the academic study of mysticism, derived from ontological hermeneutics. In this tradition of hermeneutics, academic inquiry that is truly dialogical should allow its 'fore-projections' to be revised by the encounter with the 'other', in order to allow the voice of the 'other' to speak. In this way, Western ontological hermeneutics can itself be enriched methodologically, through the dialogical encounter with mystic traditions, and particularly the contribution that they make to the epistemological problem of the concept of God.

## Chapter 2: A Hermeneutical Approach for the Academic Study of Mysticism

### Introduction

The Western discipline of mysticism within which Barhebraeus' mystical texts are to be considered, is a discipline problematized to the extent that the very study of mysticism is being called into question, with the suggestion that the term 'mysticism' should be abandoned altogether. Therefore, an examination of the different modes of inquiry within the study of mysticism is undertaken for the purpose of delineating an approach that becomes central to this thesis. Mapping this academic literature on mysticism is thereby an exploration of the conceptual methodology of a hermeneutical approach to mysticism.

The two dominant ways of studying mysticism appear to be incommensurable, and any inquiry into mysticism today needs to engage with this debate in order to articulate an approach that will avoid the limitations of these two rival modes of inquiry. These two approaches may be identified broadly as follows,

- what may be considered Enlightenment objectivism in the study of mysticism
- Genealogical critique of these Enlightenment approaches to mysticism in the tradition of postmodern relativism.

The formation of these categories draws on Richard J. Bernstein's philosophical analysis of the academic sciences, in his book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, and also on the more specific discussion of the discipline of religious studies by Gavin Flood, whose book *The Importance of Religion* categorises the predominant approaches to the study of mysticism as universalism and relativism.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, the debate is mapped out so that this mapping becomes the evidence for the hermeneutical approach adopted in this thesis. This chapter is in four sections:

---

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Gavin D. Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 81.

- It commences with the attempt to capture the current articulation of the debate between the approaches of Enlightenment objectivism and postmodern relativism.
- The second examines critically the various approaches as part of the Enlightenment mode of inquiry, in order to reveal its limitations.
- The third part explores the various critiques offered by recent postmodern approaches within the Western academic study of mysticism, with a view to showing the limitations of a purely constructivist approach.
- The fourth part intends to go beyond the conventional approaches of the Enlightenment study of mysticism and its genealogical critique, by exploring a middle path in philosophical hermeneutics that has developed post-Heidegger in the twentieth century, especially in the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.

In reviewing the literature in the Western academic study of mysticism, philosophical hermeneutics has yet to be seriously engaged within this discipline, although Martin Heidegger's thought has been used to a certain extent by Michel de Certeau. While Flood has used Ricoeur extensively, and Richard King has similarly used Gadamer, these scholars work within the overall, comprehensive field of religion, though they apply their approaches to mysticism as part of their wider work on the study of religion.<sup>3</sup>

### Background to the Debate

While the academic study of mysticism certainly has its adherents, there is also a certain reticence in contemporary scholarship to associate itself with the term, unless some understanding of mysticism can be drawn from a well-established position. In their preface to *Mystics: Presence and Aporia* published in 2003, the editors Michael Kessler and Christine Sheppard give their reasons for a deliberate avoidance of the term 'mysticism' due to 'the totalizing connotations of the suffix "ism", where "mysticism" would be understood as one among many rationally categorizable "isms" – atheism, polytheism,

---

<sup>3</sup> Brainerd Prince's PhD thesis on Sri Aurobindo follows the trajectory of King and Flood in the incorporation of dialogical hermeneutics in the study of religion, to outline the approach of 'traditional hermeneutics' and the Samvāda tradition of inquiry. Prince, Brainerd. "Aurobindo's Integralism : Study of Religion and the Hermeneutics of Tradition." (Thesis (Ph.D.), Middlesex University, 2012), 29-34, 356-57.



pantheism, mysticism'.<sup>4</sup> Instead they take up the alternative proposed by Michel de Certeau, whose 'excavation' of *le mystique* provides the inspiration for the approach of the volume *Mystics*, in recognising that the term itself has its own particular history in Christian tradition, but also that the language of *le mystique* extends to a plurality of phenomena. However, the editors recognise that to deploy for their varied subject matter, a term in translation from the French, born in the ecclesiastics of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, sets up for the volume itself a 'self-conscious anachronism and semantic oddity'.<sup>5</sup> The necessity for this semantic anachronism stems from the avoidance of the over-used term 'mysticism' and particularly its associations with the universalizing values of the phenomenology of religion, inheriting both the trans-historical values of the Enlightenment and the Romanticist reactionary perspective of the experiencing self.<sup>6</sup>

Leigh Eric Schmidt identifies the *lacunae* between Certeau's 'genealogy' of the emergence of mysticism as a phenomena in early modern Europe and the development of mysticism as the object of empirical study in the secular university with the psychology of William James. Schmidt provides an exploration of the 'making' of modern mysticism in the Anglo-American world, to develop the background to the nineteenth century preoccupation with mysticism, evidenced in James's study, as a Romanticist response to a growing awareness of religious pluralism.<sup>7</sup> Bernard McGinn's survey of approaches in Western mysticism complements Schmidt's contextualisation, by highlighting how the theological interest in mysticism in the inter-war years of the early twentieth century was particularly driven by French Jesuits such as Augustin-Francois Poulain, J. Maréchal and Henri Bremond. Their interest, which was complemented by German Catholic writing on the subject, was driven by debates over the role of mysticism in the Christian life as well as its perceived relation to other religious traditions.<sup>8</sup> McGinn's survey divides the field between the theological, the

---

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard, *Mystics : Presence and Aporia*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

<sup>6</sup> Gavin D. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London ; New York: Cassell, 1999), 104-05.

<sup>7</sup> Leigh Eric Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 280.

philosophical, and the comparativist and psychological approaches. He states in his introduction that 'we must still ask what mysticism is', and does not seek to undermine the inquiry into mysticism *per se*.<sup>9</sup> This is perhaps to be expected from a survey that forms an appendix to a multi-volume overview of Western Christian mysticism. Indeed the problems arise mainly when scholars seek to apply these Western categories, tied as they are to the history of Europe, to other cultures and religions.

Genealogies of the European understanding of mysticism have thus been offered from various different perspectives, such as the feminist with Grace Jantzen, and the postcolonial critique of King.<sup>10</sup> The genealogical project as such evolved in other areas, and is epitomised by the analysis of knowledge as socially constructed discourse by, for example, Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*.<sup>11</sup> Jantzen has portrayed the privatisation of mysticism as a social construct of Western culture, exemplified by William James's relegation of mysticism to the personal and individual realm of experience.<sup>12</sup> King has shown how the erosion of mystical aspects in Western culture has led to post-Enlightenment thought projecting these characteristics onto the 'mystic East', a process which has contributed to the definition of Western cultural identity.<sup>13</sup> Thus, these genealogies of mysticism have left the academic study of mysticism at an impasse, casting it as a mere by-product of Eurocentric 'historical and cultural situatedness'.<sup>14</sup> The question becomes how to read and how to represent the other, without continuing with the theological, patriarchal, rationalist and orientalist agendas. Indeed the paradox remains as to how this 'other' can be identified or categorised as an 'object' of study without the

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>10</sup> See the section 'A genealogy of mysticism' in: Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12-18. See King's Chapter 1: 'The power of definitions: a genealogy of the idea of 'the mystical'. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999), 7-34.

<sup>11</sup> For Foucault's discussion of genealogy following Nietzsche's use of the term in the *Genealogy of Morality*, see: Gavin D. Flood, *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 243. King discusses the significance of Berger and Luckmann for social constructivism within sociology. King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 170.

<sup>12</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 18-25.

<sup>13</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 73.

criteria that was shaped by these agendas; so that the phenomenon of mysticism does not become devoid of content and definition.

This state of affairs is reflected in the fact that any mention of mysticism seems to require using the term in quotation marks. To talk of 'mysticism', is thus to acknowledge that this is a category problematized to such an extent, that it has even been designated as 'an illusion, unreal, a false category', by Hans H. Penner.<sup>15</sup> Schmidt comments that 'Penner, in effect, set perpetual quotation marks around the term to signal the emptiness of its *sui generis* pretensions to universality and transcendence.'<sup>16</sup> For Penner the study of 'mysticism' has itself distorted a set of 'puzzling data' which has 'led scholars to construct so-called mystical systems and, in turn, to see 'mysticism' as the essence of religion'. Penner is typical of the constructivist trend, articulated most vociferously by Steven T. Katz, which is highly dismissive of the legacy of the 'classical approaches to mysticism'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed the constructivist position developed in reaction to these so-called classical approaches, which encompass various forms of phenomenological inquiry into mysticism, including the perennialist philosophy, and deriving from an approach to religion inspired by the Enlightenment hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher.<sup>18</sup>

The classical scholars of the academic study of mysticism sought to protect religious phenomena from the reductionist explanation of the natural sciences, by emphasising the subjective nature of mystics' claims to religious experience. Schmidt suggests that this approach was 'designed to seal off a guarded domain for religious experience amid modernity – one in which religious feelings would be safe from reductionistic explanations and scientific incursions'.<sup>19</sup> Wayne Proudfoot sees the development of mysticism as a subject of academic study, as a 'protective strategy' from the Romantic theology of

---

<sup>15</sup> Hans H. Penner, "The Mystical Illusion," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 89.

<sup>16</sup> Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," 274.

<sup>17</sup> See Penner's summary of these classical approaches. Penner, "The Mystical Illusion," 90-94.

<sup>18</sup> For the significance of Schleiermacher for the study of mysticism, see discussion in: Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 311-20.

<sup>19</sup> Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," 274.

Schleiermacher onwards.<sup>20</sup> However, this strategy, typified by the classical scholars of mysticism, has been exposed to a Nietzschean perspectivism in the critical theory of religion and this critique is reflected in the constructivist approach to mysticism. Despite the often illusory nature of mysticism for the constructivist scholars, alternative approaches have accentuated the distinctiveness of the mystics' claims within their religious traditions. These approaches seek both a re-envisioning of the linguistic operations of the mystics' text, as deployed in the thought of Michel de Certeau,<sup>21</sup> and the non-linguistic nature of mystical experience, as suggested by Robert K. C. Forman's exposition of pure consciousness and the apophatic tradition.<sup>22</sup> Certeau's work demonstrates how a continued reflexivity of method within a highly problematized category of study, may yield further insights from within historically situated linguistic studies that reach beyond the social construction of reality. The approach of Certeau suggests the possibility of a third method of enquiry, that offers a middle way between the polarised positions of phenomenology, which tends to blur the differences of religious plurality, and the cultural relativism that affirms the untranslatability of this plurality. While there is an on-going debate concerning the need for a revision of this kind of cultural relativism that has sought to supplant the neutral objectivity of the scholar, there have been few voices offering a solution.

## Enlightenment Objectivism

The approaches to mysticism in this section are grouped together in terms of their universalising view of the objectivist stance assumed by the neutral observer. Flood claims that the search for an objective reality beyond its representation in text and practice is shared by both the naturalist and the phenomenological approach, in that both pursue a 'scientific' method variously conceived. In point of fact, 'both the phenomenologist Edmund

---

<sup>20</sup> Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1985), 119-54.

<sup>21</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable* [La fable mystique.], trans. Michael B. Smith., Religion and Postmodernism, vol. 1, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Robert K. C. Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 172.

Husserl and the sociologist Max Weber regarded their methods as objectivist science'.<sup>23</sup> Of course their empirical objectives differed considerably, while Weber stated that the 'essence' of religion was not his concern but the task of studying 'the conditions and effects of a particular type of social action',<sup>24</sup> Husserl's methods sought the essential being behind these social forms. While the phenomenologies of religion that derived from Husserl's philosophical phenomenology might not always recognise their own practices as scientific in the conventional sense, they share the attempt to produce accurate description in the creating of typologies for their phenomena in order to suggest the essence, be it mystical or otherwise, of these religious forms. This is as appropriate to the psychology of James who sought materialist explanations for mystical phenomena, as it is for the sociology of Weber and his model of 'ideal types' which classes mystics and ascetics along with the 'charisma' of the prophet and saint.

### Sociology and Explanation

While Weber is an unlikely representative of Romanticism, Sven Eliaeson shows how his concept of 'understanding' or *Verstehen* had its history in this reaction to the Enlightenment, and thus his methodology 'shared the language of romanticism and indeed grew out of it'. Weber clearly rejected the association of *Verstehen* with the notion of 'empathetic understanding' or *Einfühlung* and insisted that understanding had to be met by *rationale Evidenz*.<sup>25</sup> Instead of pursuing an empathetic awareness of the religious subject, particularly inspired by the Romantic tradition coming from Schleiermacher and Dilthey, Weber's science was concerned with the evidence of reality. In the *Methodology of the Social Sciences*, he declared that 'The type of social science in which we are interested is an empirical science of concrete *reality*'.<sup>26</sup> Flood argues that for Weber, *Verstehen* is the empirical method that penetrates the reality surrounding our lives and 'arrives at an objective account of social history, albeit an objectivity constrained by culture and the

---

<sup>23</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1993), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Sven Eliaeson, "Max Weber's Methodology: An Ideal - Type," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36, no. 3 (2000): 242-43.

<sup>26</sup> Weber's comment is quoted by Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 29. See further: Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. Henry A. Finch and Edward A. Shils (New York: Free Press, 1949), 72.

conditions of production'.<sup>27</sup> Weber applied his objective methods to depict the role of the ascetic and the mystic in terms of how 'charisma' functioned in society.

The Weberian distinction of the 'rejection of the world' by the ascetic, who retains 'at least the negative inner relationship with it', from the 'flight from the world' by the contemplative mystic, places these charismatic types in a somewhat antagonistic relationship to each other.<sup>28</sup> However, Weber's model of the routinization of charisma has formed an illuminating vision of capitalism and the Protestant work ethic. Flood considers this 'dialectic' of routinization and charisma to be Weber's most lasting insight, in the instrumental role of Protestant religion on economics, when 'the otherworldly asceticism of the monasteries became a this-worldly asceticism as part of everyday life.'<sup>29</sup> However, even Weber maintains only a marginalised role for religion in society, in keeping with the secularist project of sociology that emphasises the 'unfolding of rationalisation' as the driving force of history.<sup>30</sup> Weber understood his contemporary world as suffering from a condition of disenchantment with the retreat of religion, and it is in this atmosphere of retreat that Weber views the role of the religious in society.

Weber's neo-Kantian notion of relativism meant that he accepted that 'Reality can never be apprehended fully in any set of concepts' and his construction of the 'ideal types' reflects the inevitable distance between concepts and reality.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless the drive of the social sciences to measure this concrete reality made recourse to the methods of the natural sciences. In keeping with this trend, Weber conceived ideal systems of historical causality that drew on jurisprudence, i.e. the law is governed by its own rules of abstraction.<sup>32</sup> Peter Winch in his assessment of social science, around fifty years later, criticised this tendency in the social sciences and more specifically Weber's methods which relied on the validity of

---

<sup>27</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 29.

<sup>28</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* [Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.], trans. Ephraim Fischoff (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), 545.

<sup>29</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 45.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>31</sup> Eliaeson, "Max Weber's Methodology: An Ideal - Type," 261.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 255.

‘statistical laws based on observations of what happens’.<sup>33</sup> Winch continued that, ‘if a proffered interpretation is wrong, statistics, though they may suggest that this is so, are not the decisive and ultimate court of appeal for the validity of sociological interpretation in the way Weber suggests’.<sup>34</sup> Bernstein comments that Winch’s attack extended to the ‘positivist models of knowledge and rationality’ as they are evidenced in Weber’s sociology, and that such an attack formed a parallel to Thomas Kuhn’s incommensurability thesis.<sup>35</sup> Bernstein argues that Winch despite his focus on the social disciplines rather than the philosophy of science,

Like Kuhn, he [Winch] was protesting against the pervasive ethnocentrism whereby we measure and judge what is initially strange and alien to us by “our” present standards, as if they were the sole and exclusive measure of rationality.<sup>36</sup>

The charge of ethnocentrism made by Winch, recurred frequently in the critique of the standards of neutral objectivity in both sociology and the phenomenology of religion, in order to highlight the tradition-specific nature of their standards of rationality.

### **Mysticism and the Psychology of Religion**

The reductive explanation of mysticism, so apparent in the sociology of religion, is also characteristic of the psychology of religion; both disciplines are very much implicated in the Enlightenment project of offering empirical explanations from supposedly neutral objective standpoints. Frits Staal argues that while Sigmund Freud’s theories could be appropriated for the study of mysticism, his more explicit statements are overly determined by his conviction that ‘all religion is an illusion’. Carl Jung on the other hand, takes us to the opposite extreme, in which his metaphysical realm of ‘archetypes’ only provides ‘an ever-elusive framework’, which fares no better when used in the explanation

---

<sup>33</sup> Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, 27. This is Bernstein’s presentation of Winch’s argument, see further: Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science, and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1990), 113.

<sup>34</sup> *The Idea of a Social Science, and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 113.

<sup>35</sup> Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

of mysticism by Jungian disciples such as E. Neumann.<sup>37</sup> However, well before the Freudian method of psychoanalysis and Jung's recourse to the sublime, came the schema of philosopher and psychologist, William James, who gave us an initial classification of the four types of mystical experience. With James's approach, mysticism became a category capable of rational enquiry, but he seems to have restrained from reaching the naturalist conclusions more typical of later Freudian psychoanalysis.

James's approach, while he located the causes of mysticism within altered states of consciousness, is better understood within the wider framework of nineteenth century liberal Protestantism, than in terms of the later developments in the psychology of religion. Indeed Leigh Schmidt's article traces the multiple strands that constituted this world, from 'the Romantic construct of mysticism' to the popular interest in the other religions of the East and the academic interest in comparative religion at the Harvard Divinity School.<sup>38</sup> That James saw mysticism exclusively in terms of the mystical experience was in keeping with what Schmidt calls 'the innovations of the era'.<sup>39</sup> However, the particular contribution of James was the application of his medical training in psychology to his analysis of religious experience, and mysticism as a particular 'variety' of this experience. In a series of lectures given at Edinburgh University at the turn of the twentieth century, subsequently published as *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James established the realm of religious experience as distinguished by the mystical. His fourfold categorisation of mystical experience – ineffable, noetic, transient, and passive - became foundational for subsequent studies on mysticism. For James, it was his empirical study of human nature that provided him with what he saw as his only access to these 'mystical states', which he admitted he could appreciate 'only at second hand', since 'my own constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely'.<sup>40</sup> The components of his empirical study of mysticism consisted of his interaction with literary texts and his personal experimentation with nitrous oxide intoxication. The latter served to replicate the mystical experience, breaking

---

<sup>37</sup> Frits Staal, *Exploring Mysticism : A Methodological Essay* (Berkeley Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 1975), 112-13.

<sup>38</sup> Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," 287.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>40</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*, Penguin Classics (New York ; London: Penguin Books, 1985), 379.



down the 'rational consciousness' to which he felt subject, in order to gain an intuitive feeling for mystical states.<sup>41</sup> James's statement 'that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness',<sup>42</sup> suggests that the mystical states provided empirical evidence for the more everyday type of individual religious experience.

This view may be contextualised within Schmidt's New England circles whose views had already been expressed in publications like the *Christian Examiner* in 1844, 'as a higher stage in spiritual life has been reached, we find the mysticism of religious experience'.<sup>43</sup> Schmidt's comment that this is 'a phrase reminiscent of Schleiermacher and worthy of James', might indicate that there is a further aspect to James's psychology of mysticism. This aspect appears in its possible alignment with Protestant theological attempts, often identified with Schleiermacher, to respond to the criticisms characteristic of the Enlightenment. Although James may be credited with the first sustained application of psychology to mysticism, his personal philosophy was also more deeply enmeshed within the intellectual currents of Romanticism and liberal Protestantism than his 'psychology' of religious experience would seem to suggest. James seems almost to avoid drawing conclusions about the object of the religious experiences that he analysed. In contrast to James's focus on the varieties of religious experience, was Rudolf Otto's interest in interpreting experience as experience of otherness, and, as it disclosed, the infinite otherness of the holy.

### Experience of the Sacred

In *The Idea of the Holy*, originally published in German as *Das Heilige* in 1917,<sup>44</sup> Otto emphasised the numinous object of man's religious nature, the holy or the sacred, which he took as an *a priori* category. For this notion of the *a priori* category, Otto made direct reference to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (first published in 1781), 'though all our

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 387-88.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>43</sup> Henry Ware Jr writing for the *Christian Encounter*, 1944, is quoted in: Schmidt, "The Making of Modern Mysticism," 286.

<sup>44</sup> Huyo Ishida, "Otto's Theory of Religious Experience as Encounter with the Numinous and Its Application to Buddhism," *Japanese Religions* XVI, no. 4 (1989): 17.

knowledge begins *with* experience, it by no means follows that all arises *out of* experience'.<sup>45</sup> Otto defined religious experience more precisely as an experience of otherness, an otherness identified as 'the numinous'. The numinous object of man's religious nature is thereby a universal one applicable to all religious systems. Indeed Otto's idea of the numinous experience is emphatically non-rational and very much in the tradition of Schleiermacher's description of personal intuition and feeling for the infinite. Jacques Waardenberg placed Otto in the line of German theologians such as Schleiermacher, in that he used 'a normative concept of religion which ultimately goes back to a theological tradition'.<sup>46</sup> For Otto, personal religious experience of the 'wholly other'<sup>47</sup> was foundational to his conception of 'the religious life'.<sup>48</sup> Huyo Ishida states that Schleiermacher's 'analysis of the religious feeling as such was in many ways a forerunner of Otto's own analysis'.<sup>49</sup> Wayne Proudfoot locates the provenance of the idea of religious experience within Western tradition, particularly identifying Schleiermacher, who claimed that fundamentally religion is founded on the 'sense of the infinite' or 'the feeling of absolute dependence'.<sup>50</sup> Robert H. Sharf comments that Schleiermacher's whole emphasis on feeling was driven by his 'interest in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions'.<sup>51</sup> It is then to Schleiermacher that Otto's philosophy of religion is indebted, in seeking to universalise an idea of religious essentialism that was in turn indebted to Western theological thinking and developed in the context of rational empiricism.

---

<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed. (Oxford U.P, 1950), 113.

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion : Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 60.

<sup>47</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ishida, "Otto's Theory of Religious Experience as Encounter with the Numinous and Its Application to Buddhism," 17.

<sup>50</sup> Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, xii-xv. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion : Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* [Über die Religion.], trans. Richard Crouter, Texts in German Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928).

<sup>51</sup> Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 98.

Otto advanced the proposition that mysticism is the apex of religious experience, but it is also representative of the thinking of James and Evelyn Underhill. In *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto states that 'essentially mysticism is the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion; and it is only intelligible when so understood.'<sup>52</sup> This emphatic connection to religious experience does seem suggestive of the thought of Schleiermacher and his representation of religious feeling as prefiguring the dogmatic and institutionalised forms of religious expression. Otto's understanding of mysticism, which he outlined in a subsequent publication *Mysticism East and West*, is entirely dependent on his theory of religious experience. Ishida has pointed out that 'the underlying theme is always the numinous experience, which had been already developed and discussed in *The Idea of the Holy*'.<sup>53</sup> Otto's *Mysticism East and West* dealt specifically with the parallels between the thinking of the eighth century Shankara and Meister Eckhart (1260-1328CE); Otto derived the framework for his analysis from *The Idea of the Holy*. In examining Otto's theory of encounter with the numinous in terms of its application to Buddhism, Ishida questioned 'the presuppositional idea of the subject-object distinction'. He concluded that Otto's assumption of an 'ontological structure' was quite unsuitable to Buddhism, but allowed for its potential use in other traditions.<sup>54</sup> The basis for any such *a priori* categories in the approach to mysticism has been questioned considerably in recent scholarship, a point that will be dealt with further in terms of the constructivist position.

*The Idea of the Holy* was the first major comparative study of its time on mysticism,<sup>55</sup> and proposed that the experience of the mystics was synonymous with his *a priori* category of the numinous, the universal religious experience. This connection became so intrinsic to the classical approaches to mysticism that this scholarship tended to see the mystical as a category of religious experience. The stance has led Sharf, in his article on "Experience", to

---

<sup>52</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> Ishida, "Otto's Theory of Religious Experience as Encounter with the Numinous and Its Application to Buddhism," 23.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism: A Critical Survey," *Religion : a Journal of Religion and Religions* 3 (1973): 146.

note that 'the academic literature does not clearly delineate the relationship between religious experience and mystical experience'.<sup>56</sup> Indeed this lack of differentiation is indicative of the role that the mystical has played in attempts to define what is fundamental to religious experience; a point which is developed further by Richard King, and discussed in the later section on the hermeneutical approach to mysticism.

### Perennialism and the Spiritual Consciousness

James's analyses were subject to modifications, but his identification of experience as the empirical data for the study of mysticism continued to be normative in discussions of spiritual consciousness. The shift from philosophies of consciousness to philosophies of language and semiotics seems to have coincided with the domination of 'constructivism' in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>57</sup> However the constructivist model should be seen against the backdrop of the 'perennialists' as Forman points out,<sup>58</sup> if such a general term can really be used for all of James's more immediate successors. Broadly, these scholars attempted not only to classify common cross-cultural mystical experiences but also to draw conclusions from them on the nature of mystical consciousness.<sup>59</sup> James had concentrated on the noetic quality of mystical experience, the providing of *noēsis* in states of knowledge or 'insight into depths of truth'.<sup>60</sup> Underhill, whose study of mysticism was published within a decade of James's lectures, is paradigmatic of the renewed interest in spiritual consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

Underhill took issue with the categories of mystical experience put forward by James but maintained in her seminal studies, his focus on the psychological experience of

---

<sup>56</sup> Sharf, "Experience," 94.

<sup>57</sup> Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, 31.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> In his Introduction, Otto maintains that alongside the 'many varieties of expression' in mysticism, there is 'an inner relationship of types of human experience and spiritual life', and thus makes general conclusions on the nature of mystical consciousness, without identifying himself as a perennialist. Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West : A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*, trans. Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne (Macmillan, 1932), xvi.

<sup>60</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*, 380.

<sup>61</sup> Underhill argues in her opening essay for three phases to the mystical consciousness which claims 'to an apprehension of the divine unifying principle behind appearance'. Evelyn Underhill, *The Essentials of Mysticism : And Other Essays* (London: Dent, 1920), 14-15.

mysticism.<sup>62</sup> However, she rejected the idea that mystical states were merely transient or that the experiencing subject was passive throughout; instead she believed that mysticism was practical, an entirely spiritual activity that did not depend on the theoretical. In this way, Underhill directed her attention to that perception of the numinous in 'the self-conscious subject', or 'the I' of that experience;<sup>63</sup> the particular self-knowing subject of the mystics was the 'transcendental self'. For her, the study of mysticism revealed, 'a genuine two-foldness in human nature—the difference in kind between *Animus* the surface-self and *Anima* the transcendental self, in touch with supernatural realities'.<sup>64</sup> This concern with the 'transcendental self', which Walter Stace seems to reflect in his own references to the 'infinite and universal self',<sup>65</sup> has proved a popular theme for perennialist writers on mysticism. Robert C. Zaehner argues however that the perennialists neither defined 'what precisely constitutes a mystical experience', nor could their claim that all mystics speak the same language be justified.<sup>66</sup> Penner reiterates this kind of argument when he stated that perennialist scholars of mysticism did not provide a system of rules to justify their belief that 'mystical languages, or types of languages, express an identical experience'.<sup>67</sup>

Admittedly, perennialism is difficult to define precisely; its application to the classical approaches to mysticism is necessarily vague. Forman describes the perennialists as believing 'that all religious experiences are similar and, further, that those experiences represent a direct contact with a (variously defined) absolute principle'.<sup>68</sup> Perennialism is also suggestive of those scholars who invested themselves personally in the universalizing tendencies of the study of mysticism that characterized at least the first half of the twentieth century. This personal investment took various forms; Underhill's book adopted

---

<sup>62</sup> For example, amongst her more general works on mysticism are the following: *The Spiritual Life : Four Broadcast Talks by Evelyn Underhill* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937); *Practical Mysticism : A Little Book for Normal People* (Guildford: Eagle, 1991); *The Mystics of the Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1975); *The Mystic Way : A Psychological Study in Christian Origins* (London: Dent, 1913); *The Essentials of Mysticism : And Other Essays*.

<sup>63</sup> *Mysticism : A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1911), 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 147.

<sup>66</sup> R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 27.

<sup>67</sup> Penner, "The Mystical Illusion," 90.

<sup>68</sup> Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, 31.

a romantically engaged approach to her subjects, others sought a more clinical access to the spiritual consciousness. James was far from alone in his enthusiasm to experiment with nitrous oxide in order to imitate the mystical states of such fascination to him; narcotics also feature heavily in Aldous Huxley's encounter with mystical experience.<sup>69</sup> These two scholars prompted different responses from Zaehner; whilst he praised James's analysis of mystical experience for its detachment, he was scathing of the partiality of Huxley's conclusions<sup>70</sup> and his self-professed purpose in writing *Mysticism: Sacred and Profane*, was to counter the religious 'indifferentism' conveyed by Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*.<sup>71</sup> That Huxley had been an ardent defender of the 'perennial philosophy', a term which he can be credited with popularizing,<sup>72</sup> was clear in his 1944 book bearing this very title.<sup>73</sup> However, Huxley was hardly the originator of the philosophy or a particularly lucid exponent; Zaehner has pointed out that the leading advocates of his time were Ananda Coomaraswamy,<sup>74</sup> René Guénon<sup>75</sup> and Frithjof Schuon.<sup>76</sup> Whilst these perennialist thinkers continue to have their modern exponents, such as Huston Smith and James S. Cutsinger,<sup>77</sup> most contemporary scholars of mysticism have been condemning of their central claims.

### Descriptive Phenomenologies

The 'essentialist reductionism' characteristic of the scholars that have been discussed in the previous section, tended to reduce all mystical accounts to an essential mystical

---

<sup>69</sup> Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*, xiv.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. Zaehner's critique of Huxley is contained in the first two chapters.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., xiv. See further: Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954).

<sup>72</sup> Sharf, "Experience," 96.

<sup>73</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Triad Grafton, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Roger Lipsey, and Bollingen Foundation Collection (Library of Congress), *Coomaraswamy*, 3 vols., Bollingen Series (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>75</sup> Christophe Andruzac, *René Guénon: La Contemplation Métaphysique et L'expérience Mystique* (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1980).

<sup>76</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953). *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing, 1976). Zaehner criticises the *philosophia perennis* 'which would set itself above creed and which therefore interprets all creeds from its own a priori notions'. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> James S. Cutsinger, *Paths to the Heart : Sufism and the Christian East*, The Perennial Philosophy Series (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2002). This volume of essays from the 2001 international conference *Paths to the Heart* is dedicated to Frithjof Schuon by the editor James S. Cutsinger, with some *Conclusions* from Huston Smith.

experience common to all traditions.<sup>78</sup> In response, a more descriptive phenomenological trend emerged in the academic study of mysticism of Zaehner, Walter Stace and Ninian Smart, that was to differentiate certain typologies of mystical experience according to the diverse descriptions of mystical reports. In contrast to the *philosophia perennis*, Zaehner stated his own aim to be ‘an unbiased approach to the phenomenology of mysticism’.<sup>79</sup> Zaehner has been roundly criticised for avowedly personal theological judgements,<sup>80</sup> but he offered a distinction between the ‘praeternatural’ mystical experience (in which he included Huxley’s experiences), and other religious types. In doing so, he makes a fundamental distinction between the theistic, evidenced most profoundly in Christian mysticism, and the monistic, where he places Buddhism and some characteristics of Hindu, Christian and Sufi mysticism.<sup>81</sup> In his third praeternatural category, which appears to be the lowest in Zaehner’s system, are placed all other religious experiences, including the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Keats. These he considers to be of the natural or panentheistic type, ‘the experience of all as one or one as all’, as in the Upanishads.<sup>82</sup> Frits Staal’s response to such a hierarchical scheme is to place Zaehner within his section on the ‘dogmatic approaches’ of his methodological essay on how mysticism should *not* be studied.<sup>83</sup> Irrespective, Zaehner’s contribution marks a significant shift away from the homogenising vision of perennialism, that the same core experience may be described in various ways, towards the idea of these various descriptions pointing to inherently different experiences of mysticism.<sup>84</sup> What is required and what the perennialists essentially overlooked for Zaehner is to ‘define what precisely constitutes a mystical

---

<sup>78</sup> Katz’s accusation: Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz, Studies in Philosophy and Religion (London: Sheldon Press, 1978), 24.

<sup>79</sup> Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> See for example the critique made by Stace, Smart and Katz: Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 36. Ninian Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 13. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 31.

<sup>81</sup> For this fundamental division of mysticism, see the Conclusion. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*, 204. ‘Here, then, are two distinct and mutually opposed types of mysticism, - the monist and the theistic... it is an unbridgeable gulf between all those who see God as incomparably greater than oneself, though He is, at the same time, the root and ground of one’s being, and those who maintain that soul and God are one and the same and that all else is pure illusion.’

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>83</sup> Staal, *Exploring Mysticism : A Methodological Essay*, 67-69. Staal’s criticism is mainly aimed at Zaehner’s 1960 book on *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism*, in that it contributes little to our understanding of these forms of mysticism.

<sup>84</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 339.

experience'.<sup>85</sup> In this endeavour, Stace and Smart sought to refine what defines this phenomenon in its many varieties; implicit in their understanding is that mystical experience is the basis for the descriptive interpretation in the mystic's account. The degree to which they explore the interpretative nature of this description is precisely what distinguishes Smart's more finely nuanced approach to Stace's. While recognising that the path to understanding is 'phenomenological', Smart also stresses the necessity of disentanglement, in order to perceive the 'degrees of interpretation in their descriptions', as well as the 'performative' and 'existential' aspects.<sup>86</sup>

Stace's philosophy of mysticism in his work published in 1960, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, became a well-known position and the cause of much academic debate. In his 1973 survey of studies on mysticism, Peter Moore declared that Stace's 'philosophical study of mysticism has probably been the most influential work on the subject since William James'.<sup>87</sup> Stace categorised what he saw as the universality of mystical experience in two ways, 'introvertive' and 'extrovertive', a distinction that he apparently derived from Otto.<sup>88</sup> Stace distinguishes these two main types as follows, 'that the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind'.<sup>89</sup> The extrovertive mystic perceives through his physical senses, the One who mystically transfigures 'the multiplicity of external material objects'.<sup>90</sup> The introvertive mystic also perceives the One but in his own ego, 'by deliberately shutting off the senses' from this multiplicity.<sup>91</sup> Moore suggested that Stace's introvertive mysticism is comparable to Zaehner's monistic and theistic categories, while the extrovertive to Zaehner's 'panenhenic' or naturalist mysticism.<sup>92</sup> He cast doubt on the efficacy of Stace's phenomenology of mystical experience, since the evidence provided from various mystical texts is quotations 'mostly brief, often second-hand and generally given without reference to their original

---

<sup>85</sup> Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*, 27.

<sup>86</sup> Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 20.

<sup>87</sup> Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism: A Critical Survey," 149.

<sup>88</sup> The connection of Stace and Otto is suggested by Moore. Ibid. Stace himself refers to the terminology of both Otto and Underhill, in defining the introvertive experience. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 61.

<sup>89</sup> *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 61.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>92</sup> Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism: A Critical Survey," 149.



contexts'.<sup>93</sup> This criticism could also be applied to many of the 'classic' works on mysticism considered so far. Similar objections have been made to the misrepresentations of mystical texts in Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy* and Rudolf Otto's *Mysticism East and West*.<sup>94</sup> Moore also suggested that Stace 'underestimates the complexity of the experience-interpretation relationship', imagining a straightforward and linear relationship 'between the contents of a mystical experience and the language or symbols of its interpretation'.<sup>95</sup> Stace had attempted a distinction between the 'sense experience' and 'conceptual interpretation' in responding to Zaehner, but he persisted in trying to isolate the 'pure' experience.<sup>96</sup> However the alternative classifications which Stace developed did not sufficiently take into account the complexities of contextuality.<sup>97</sup>

Smart's approach returned to the phenomenologies provided by Otto, Zaehner and Stace, in offering a simplified schema, bringing out the interplay of experience and interpretation. Experience is presented as a more unified category, its varieties suggest 'ascribing difference of description to doctrinal interpretation'.<sup>98</sup> Smart suggested that the interior types of religious experience that Zaehner had differentiated into theistic and monistic are essentially within the same category of interior mysticism; his point being that, 'The gaps within the monistic category are big enough for it not to seem implausible to count the gap between monism and theism as no wider'.<sup>99</sup> Drawing on Otto, Smart contended that religious experience is more appropriately divided into the 'numinous' and the 'mystical', but this is only defended as 'a rough distinction'. He reclassified the more romantic forms of naturalist or Zaehner's 'panenhenic' mysticism into the 'numinous', along with the prophetic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and Buddhist experiences into the 'mystical'.<sup>100</sup> If Stace veered towards perennialism, Smart came much closer to constructivism. While Smart raised issues of contextuality and suggested a more reflexive

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, 32.

<sup>95</sup> Moore, "Recent Studies of Mysticism: A Critical Survey," 151.

<sup>96</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>97</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 27-29.

<sup>98</sup> Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 14.

<sup>99</sup> "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," *Rel. Stud.* 1, no. 1 (1965): 83. Smart's article is essentially devoted to a reconsideration of Zaehner's distinction of the theistic category from the monistic form of mysticism.

<sup>100</sup> "Understanding Religious Experience," 13.

model of experience and interpretation, he did not attempt to defend his position philosophically in the manner more typical of the scholarship that has critiqued the phenomenological approaches to mysticism. The nature of the debate on the mediation of mystical experience illustrates the current incommensurability between these rival approaches, phenomenological and constructivist, in the academic study of mysticism.

## **Genealogical Critique of Objectivist Approaches**

Contextuality has come to the fore in the constructivist approach, to the extent that it has become almost impossible to talk of mystical experience without subscribing to a particular philosophy of language. Typically, this trend has objected to the presupposition of mystical experience as a cross-cultural phenomenon, maintaining that mystical experience in itself could not form the sole preoccupation of scholars. The descriptive phenomenological content of the mystics' experience has lost its primacy in discussion and focus has shifted to its representation in the text. Constructivism thus views the account of the mystical experience as formed within a cultural-linguistic framework that provides the means of construction of that experience. However, this emphasis of the constructivists makes it problematic to generalise about mystical phenomena in any way and the extreme relativist approach would lead to the conclusion that even the term mysticism is only applicable to the study of Western Christian tradition. Indeed, Penner is aware that the linguistic turn in academic scholarship has led to a 'mystical relativism', which has rejected the neutral explanation of any conceptual system, postulating that the typologies of mystical experience do not recognise the incommensurability of mystical systems, in that different mystical languages represent the 'Reality' of different mystical worlds.<sup>101</sup> This perspective represents the classical study of mysticism as the mere 'reification of abstractions', an accusation which neither Penner nor other constructivists seem to be able to resolve except by turning to the semantic field of the tradition, without providing a de-reified criteria to their enquiry, and as if the neutrality of the observer can still be

---

<sup>101</sup> Penner, "The Mystical Illusion," 92-93.

maintained. On the other hand, the abstract focus in philosophical analyses of mysticism on the experience-interpretation distinction may be seen as an attempt to circumvent (rather than resolve) the challenges posed by mystical or cultural relativism.

### Constructivism and the Mediation of Experience

A variety of arguments surround the constructivist position, but Katz's ideas still predominate. In a series of articles, he proposed the argument that was to become definitive of the constructivist stance on mysticism. His premise was that the language of the mystics is determined by their cultural environment and therefore any analysis of this language is unable to give us 'unmediated' access to the 'event' of their experience. Katz argued 'that the experience itself, as well as the form in which it is reported, is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape his experience'.<sup>102</sup> Indeed Katz states even more forcefully elsewhere that 'Neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing that they are unmediated.'<sup>103</sup> This seems somewhat in contradiction to the mystics' claim to the self-authenticating nature of the experience. Katz concludes his 'deconstruction' of the 'conservative' nature of mystical experience in suggesting that tradition, reconceived by him as '*models*', contributes to the very '*creation* of experience' (italics his).<sup>104</sup>

The significance of the term 'mediation' is according to Forman, a neo-Kantian term which informs the constructivist traditions of Western analytical philosophy.<sup>105</sup> Forman questions the assumptions of constructivism and the implications of the philosophy of language to which they adhere, for the study of mysticism. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804CE) famously argued that the 'noumenon', rather than being experienced directly, is encountered through human categories which thus 'mediate' all human experience.<sup>106</sup> Katz himself refers to the Kantian description of epistemic activity concerning transcendental knowledge, from which he concludes, 'the mystic even in his

---

<sup>102</sup> Steven T. Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4.

<sup>103</sup> "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 26.

<sup>104</sup> "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience," 51.

<sup>105</sup> Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

state of reconditioned consciousness is also a shaper of his experience'.<sup>107</sup> The extreme constructivist position would therefore seem to argue without qualification that religious experience is 'mediated' by doctrinal and cultural elements; these construct the conceptual world of both the mystic and his experiences. From this position, a mystical experience of so-called 'pure consciousness' becomes logically impossible, since consciousness is always 'consciousness of something' and that object of consciousness is culturally mediated. Penner suggests that rather than speaking of pure consciousness, the significance of such mystical experience is only to be explained if one is prepared 'to locate and explain the set of relations which mediate them'.<sup>108</sup>

Criticisms of 'hard' constructivism by philosophers such as Robert Forman and William Wainwright have focussed on alternative theories of human consciousness.<sup>109</sup> Forman, who defends the state of pure consciousness, has pointed out that the constructivist philosophers of mysticism rely on theories of language formation that depend on the conditionality and intentionality of experience, and thus reflect the philosophy of Kant, Husserl and Frans Brentano.<sup>110</sup> Instead Forman has chosen to co-opt the insights of the Chinese Buddhist philosopher Paramaārtha, as well as those of the German Catholic mystic Meister Eckhart, to outline a new philosophical model for the existence of the pure conscious event. He acknowledges the efficacy of the criticism of his own work that it is perhaps 'too highly influenced by the linguistic philosophy that I have criticised'.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the debate over pure consciousness has continued to be governed by the boundaries of constructivism, rather than by close attention to the teachings of mystics such as Eckhart on the emptying of the mind.<sup>112</sup> Wainwright's 1981 book *Mysticism*, advanced another partial criticism of Forman by suggesting that even reports of a pure conscious event (PCE) could in fact be conceptual events remembered incorrectly.<sup>113</sup> He argued instead for the

---

<sup>107</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 59.

<sup>108</sup> Penner, "The Mystical Illusion," 89.

<sup>109</sup> For the distinction of 'hard' from 'soft' constructivism, see Section 6 on Constructivism in: Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014).

<sup>110</sup> Forman, *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, 78-79.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>112</sup> For this debate, see Section 5.2: Criticism of the Defense of Pure Conscious Events. Gellman, "Mysticism".

<sup>113</sup> William J. Wainwright, *Mysticism : A Study of Its Nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications* (Brighton: Wayland, 1981), 117-19.

cognitive nature of mystical claims that imply 'realms of being or types of reality hidden from the ordinary consciousness'.<sup>114</sup> Wainwright's arguments typify epistemological discussions of the cognitive aspect to mystical experience in Anglo-American philosophy.

### Epistemologies of Experience in Anglo-American Philosophy

Katz's articles established the mediation of mystical experience through what has been called the 'cultural-linguistic' framework.<sup>115</sup> The epistemology of mystical experience is concerned with philosophical questions concerning the very cognitive and perceptual nature of that experience. Alongside the linguistic turn that informs the constructivist emphasis on the mediation process, is the perceptual nature of that process provided by analytical philosophy. The principle debates in Anglo-American philosophy stem from the distinctions made by the descriptive phenomenologists between experience and its interpretation. The nuancing of this relationship has been particularly highlighted in the phenomenology of Smart, who has emphasised the 'ramifications' of the doctrinal system in the mystic's interpretation of their experience. However, within the phenomenological approach, experience has remained an essential category requiring adequate description, while the epistemological has questioned the processes of knowing and perceiving that experience without assuming that experience is *a priori* to the descriptive interpretation in the mystic's account.

Smart's exposition of doctrinal 'ramifications' accommodated the mystics' experience within the process of interpretation, suggesting only that 'the higher the degree of ramification, the less is the description guaranteed by the experience itself'.<sup>116</sup> By contrast, Moore is decidedly more emphatic concerning the role of doctrinal elements in the interpretative account, proposing that these 'may themselves mediate information about the phenomenological character of the experience and cannot therefore be discounted

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>115</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 21. Lindbeck argues concerning the cultural-linguistic alternative, that 'its roots go back on the cultural side to Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and on the linguistic side to Wittgenstein'.

<sup>116</sup> Smart, "Interpretation and Mystical Experience," 80.

either as superfluous additions or as problematic obscurations'.<sup>117</sup> For Moore, the doctrinal background of the mystic is 'a key to his experience' and not an obstacle either to the mystic understanding his own experience, or to the investigator in his phenomenological analysis.<sup>118</sup> However, the claims of mystics present a challenge to analytical philosophy in going beyond 'the limit of rational inquiry', particularly in the assertion of the ineffability of mystical experience.<sup>119</sup>

Stace provided an initial solution to the philosophical problem of ineffability, which was that since there are logical difficulties with doctrines of 'absolute' ineffability (such as the Dionysian theory), the laws of logical understanding are inapplicable to mystical experience and thus what the mystic asserts is the paradoxicality, not the ineffability, of the experience.<sup>120</sup> Smart insists that the 'inexpressible', 'indefinable', and 'incomprehensible' should not be taken to exclude describability and that there is an inherent ambiguity to such expressions, which assert instead that their experience is 'not *totally* comprehensible'.<sup>121</sup> The issue of the ineffability of mystical experience (the Jamesian insight), thus becomes of critical importance to the discussion of mystics' interpretations of their experiences, since the very interpretation of something as ineffable presents an immediate paradox in logic. McGinn concludes that the contribution of Anglo-American philosophical studies of mysticism has often taken the form of 'critical studies of the inner consistency of theories of mysticism' to the detriment of attention to the context and language of the mystical texts themselves.<sup>122</sup> Smart argues for the necessity of 'a reasonable knowledge of the empirical facts concerning religion and religions' against the over-philosophizing of mystical experience. In the debate over the mediation of that experience, Smart has emphasised the 'severe limitations upon the philosophical discussion of

---

<sup>117</sup> Peter Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 110.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>120</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 288-306. The philosopher Richard Gale is highly critical of Stace's theories and argues instead for the subjectivity over the alleged ineffability of the mystical experience. Richard M. Gale, "Mysticism and Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophy* 57, no. 14 (1960).

<sup>121</sup> Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 17.

<sup>122</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 319.

mysticism in the abstract'.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, rather than focussing on forming an adequate epistemology of mystical experience, the hermeneutical approach to the subject of mysticism must explore both the substantive and the methodological, i.e. the claims of mystic traditions and the role of academic inquiry into them.

## **A Hermeneutical Approach for the Study of Mysticism**

From the predominant modern view of reading the mystics as operating within a common core of mystical experience, cultural relativists like Katz disrupted this naïve essentialism with assertions of social construction and untranslatability. The problem of reading texts through the reduction to phenomenological essences is not solely a tendency to derive universalising philosophies of the mystical consciousness from them, but also a certain temptation to use a cross-section of mystical texts without sufficient reference to the linguistic contingency of their socio-historical context. However, the question of how to talk about what constitutes the phenomenological content of mystical language continues to raise ontological and epistemological issues beyond a constructivist philosophy. Philosophical hermeneutics provides a way forward for reconsidering these issues, in avoiding the shortcomings of the rival approaches delineated in the first two parts of this chapter. This section forms a preliminary enquiry into how philosophical hermeneutics would interface with the academic study of mysticism, by exploring some of the key themes highlighted in the approaches of King, Flood and Certeau to the study of mysticism. Indeed these scholars have identified the current impasse in the academic study of mysticism as indicative of the binaries of Western culture.

The eclipse or 'retreat' of the mystics, identified by Certeau at the dawn of the Enlightenment, signifies for King a deepening marginalisation and suppression of 'mystical' elements within Western intellectual culture.<sup>124</sup> King has suggested that Romanticism and New Age spiritualities have merely been attempts to invert the dominance of the rationalist

---

<sup>123</sup> Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 15.

<sup>124</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 27.

post-Kantian epistemology, but these have not sought to undermine the imposed polarities of the rational and the non-rational or irrational whereby mysticism tends to be positioned in the latter.<sup>125</sup> The Romanticist emphasis on feeling and the poetic, has not managed to safeguard either religion or mysticism from the opposing camp, in fact it has merely conceded to its categories. Whilst the psychological philosophy of James confirmed the established position of the mystical within the private realm of religious experience, for King this privatisation was also a marginalisation of religion and the mystical from the sphere of power and authority in the West, which had become monopolised by modernist philosophy and science in the post-Enlightenment.<sup>126</sup> The question posed now is how to move beyond the privatisation of the mystical, which has been definitive of the academic study of mysticism as surveyed in the first two parts of this chapter. The work of Certeau and Flood has promoted a fundamental shift from categorising mystical experience as subjective and as the embodiment of spirituality in tradition.

### The Linguistic Genealogy of *la mystique*

Certeau's work originally published in 1982 as *La Fable Mystique* marks a departure from the established boundaries of the conventional approaches to mysticism. As McGinn has shown, his approach can not be placed within the tradition of French theological scholarship on mysticism, which was so intense in the early twentieth century. Jeremy Ahearne's book, *Michel de Certeau, Interpretation and its Other*, has suggested that for Certeau the 'mystic science' of interpreting the 'mystics' formed around the early modern reflection on mystic writings.<sup>127</sup> Certeau's study was not a general study of mysticism, nor did his isolation of *la mystique* attempt to replace the term mysticism or *le mysticisme* with another essentialising phenomenological category, that seemed to constitute the particular fixation of pre-constructivist scholars. For Ahearne, the project of Certeau's *The Mystic Fable* was 'to trace how a sociohistorically situated 'discipline', 'la mystique', was constituted over the early modern period, and how it subsequently broke apart'.<sup>128</sup> In his

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 11-13.

<sup>127</sup> Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau : Interpretation and Its Other*, Key Contemporary Thinkers (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 96.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 95.



analysis, Certeau saw the crisis of modernity as refracted into the fragmented language of the early-modern ‘mystics’ who sought to operate at its boundaries.<sup>129</sup> From Ahearne’s overview of *The Mystic Fable*, it is apparent that while Certeau provides a linguistic genealogy of *mystique*, it is not strictly part of the genealogical project, and his approach can not be considered a Nietzschean or Freudian ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, Certeau does not reduce the mystic tradition to contemporary methods of explanation concerning psychic states or acts, and he has resisted unduly privileging the discipline of psychoanalysis which has its own historical formation from Freud to Lacan.<sup>131</sup>

Certeau delineated the specific development of the term *mystique*, which he traced from its foundations in the thirteenth century with Meister Eckhart, to ‘its greatest formalization’ in the sixteenth century with the Spanish mystics Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, and finally to its end, with the seventeenth century Angelus Silesius.<sup>132</sup> The purpose of Certeau’s historical genealogy of *mystique*, the significance of its semantic shift from adjective to noun, is to demonstrate the historical circumstances of that beginning and end of *mystique*, which does not preclude however ‘a regressive history of its formation and a study of its later embodiments’.<sup>133</sup> Certeau was thus interested in the operations of mystic discourse, ‘to determine what occurs in a field delimited by a name (“mystics”) [noun *mystique*] and within which work is being done in obedience to a relevant set of *rules*’.<sup>134</sup> What remains of the procedures of the mystics are only traces of this discourse, since mystic science, in being pledged to the impossible and the inaccessible, was destined to vanish.<sup>135</sup> Indeed Certeau’s position argued directly against the reduction of *mystique* to the common core of mystical experience, and he dismissed the pursuit of ‘a malleable ineffable that could be fashioned to fit any end’.<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>130</sup> The hermeneutics of suspicion is used by Ricoeur to designate the ‘teachers of suspicion’, Freud, Feuerbach, Marx, and of course Nietzsche. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics : Writings and Lectures, Volume 2* [Écrits et conférences. 2. Herméneutique.], trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 8.

<sup>131</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 8-9.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 15.

While the academic study of mysticism is very much a construction of modernity, Certeau has shown that the early modern mystic tradition provided the elements for its own fabrication. It may be said therefore that within the currents of modern liberalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was fabricated another tradition of mysticism, a new academic science of mysticism in world religions, in place of the early modern 'mystic science', which had been concerned with a mystic tradition and its interpretation. The critique of the modern academic study of mysticism may be considered according to the intellectual traditions that inform it, and its relation to the discourses that form the substantive object of its inquiry.<sup>137</sup> The modern discipline of the academic study of mysticism can be re-invigorated by Certeau's identification of mystic discourse, and thus the discourse of mystic traditions can contribute to the impasse in the study of mysticism.

#### From Mystical Experience to Mystic Tradition

King has highlighted 'the post-experiential emphasis in most contemporary accounts of mysticism', which reflects both the 'the influence of post-Kantian epistemology' and the Jamesian philosophical psychology.<sup>138</sup> However, the appropriateness of the term 'experience' as the foundation for the examination of the 'mystical' has not itself been sufficiently questioned by either of the rival groups of enquiry that have been discussed above.<sup>139</sup> Flood has pointed out two difficulties, first that it is doubtful that the term has the same connotations for everyone, especially if mystical experience is meant to imply an out-of-the-ordinary state of consciousness. The second difficulty is that the term also 'implies an encounter with the world through the senses', despite the fact that 'many mystical experiences are regarded as being outside of the body (and therefore beyond the senses)'.<sup>140</sup> Instead of any core mystical experience, Flood has suggested that what emerges

---

<sup>137</sup> Gavin D. Flood, "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 55. Flood's development of the three levels of discourse in religious studies is considered further for its application to the study of mysticism in Chapter 6.

<sup>138</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 8.

<sup>139</sup> See the two main sections above, 'Enlightenment Objectivism' and 'Genealogical Critique'.

<sup>140</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 82.

are ‘analogues’ of the mystical, which involve language and practices of the body across spiritual traditions.

This is to move away from an essentialist understanding of experience to locate a diversity of human experience in time and therefore in the way that experience is narrated. Indeed if we substitute the term “experience” with “narrative” or even “subjectivity”, we can offer an account of spiritual experience in terms of a sense of our continued existence through time and a shared structure which is filled out with tradition-specific contents at different historical times.<sup>141</sup>

Flood’s alternatives of ‘narrative’ and ‘subjectivity’ move beyond naïve essentialism, to talk about human existence, bodily and temporal. The existential condition of human subjectivity and its means of narrativizing, inform the account of a shared structure of spiritual traditions. Again, it is Certeau who suggests that with mystic writing there is ‘the narrativization of one’s life’, in which the autobiography of mystics such as Teresa of Avila (1515-1582CE) is thus ‘a way of “ordering one’s soul” and one’s “spirit”’.<sup>142</sup>

In Flood’s use of terminology there is a noticeable preference for the terms spirituality and the spiritual, over mysticism and the mystical. This seems to stem from a desire to distance himself from the narrow focus of academic scholars of mysticism on issues surrounding human consciousness and experience. However, Flood has also acknowledged that mysticism, like the term spirituality, has its own genealogy, and thus ‘What is now referred to as “spirituality” fell within the semantic range of the category “mysticism”’.<sup>143</sup> The term ‘mysticism’ has of course its own academic history, mainly dating to the last century, as well as its particular Christian history in the West that developed from mystical theology and deriving from Pseudo-Dionysius’s short treatise that was translated into Latin in the ninth century as *De Mystica Theologica*.<sup>144</sup> Flood has recognised that mystical theology, in the sense of ‘knowledge of God through experience’, did become distinct from dogmatic or natural theology, and knowledge through revelation or ‘reasoning about the universe’.<sup>145</sup> In

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>142</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 120.

<sup>143</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 81.

<sup>144</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 101-3.

<sup>145</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 81.

Certeau's account, the emergence of *mystique* as 'mystical science' occurred in the sixteenth century and coincided with the deployment of the Dionysian corpus in the language of theologians such as Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464CE), and when Teresa of Avila was canonized in 1615 her writings were recommended as 'books of mystical theology'.<sup>146</sup>

Certeau's project has located the emergence of the Western tradition of mystics at the cusp of modernity, rather than in the abstract field of phenomenological typologies, to which he alludes as 'the seduction of partial resemblances'.<sup>147</sup> There has been much criticism of Certeau's narrow focus, in that it seems to undermine the two rival approaches outlined above and to withdraw from the possibility of other forms of mysticism beyond his genealogy of Western mysticism. However, the methods of Certeau's analysis, can, it has been argued by McGinn, be appropriated in the study of mystics not encompassed by the confines that he established.<sup>148</sup> Flood argues that accepting the validity of tradition-specific values goes against 'a Nietzschean/Foucaultian evaluation that is fundamentally materialist and cannot allow for the possibility of transcendence'.<sup>149</sup> Tradition-based discourse opens up the linguistic processes of the mystics in their orientation towards transcendence, in that the mystical text attempts to speak of something other than itself.

### Mysticism in Syriac Studies

Since the term 'mysticism' is located within a modern European discipline of study, this raises inherent and critical problems for its application to non-Western phenomena. Certeau's retrieval of the formation of *mystique* in Western tradition has implications for Syriac studies, both linguistic and conceptual, in the understanding of 'mysticism' in Syriac. The contribution of Certeau to this question has similarly been appreciated by Sabino Chialà in his article for the recent volume, *Les Mystiques Syriennes*.<sup>150</sup> The terminology of mystics and the mystical is represented with a variety of terms in the Syriac tradition and is

---

<sup>146</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 102.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>148</sup> McGinn, *The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, 312-13.

<sup>149</sup> Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*, 247.

<sup>150</sup> Sabino Chialà, "Les Mystiques Syro-Orientaux, une École ou une Époque?," in *Les Mystiques Syriennes*, ed. Alain Desreumaux, Études Syriennes (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), 63. Chialà refers to the debate over the term 'mystic' (*mystique*) and the contribution of Certeau, in the introduction to his article on the West Syrian mystics; 'Nous savons tous combien la définition de «mystique» a retenu l'attention des éminents savants et que la question est loin d'être réglée'.

not centred on a single concept equivalent to the articulation of mysticism in Western European tradition. While the connotations of the Greek noun, *mystērion*, similarly belong to the etymology of the Syriac *rāzā*,<sup>151</sup> this term is not deployed as an adjective for the monks who follow in the Syrian Dionysian tradition; in Barhebraeus' writings they are referred to as the holy ones (*qadīšē*), engaged in spiritual practice (*rūḥānāyā*). Indeed, there has been a tendency for scholars to speak of Syriac 'spirituality', rather than Syrian 'mysticism'.<sup>152</sup> However this attention to terminology has not prevented the incorporation of conceptual categories from the academic study of mysticism into Syriac studies.

While the term 'spiritual' has slightly different connotations to the 'mystical' in English, it is still bound up with the Western history of mysticism, including the modern emphasis on the category of personal religious experience. Flood argues that the term 'spirituality' comes from the Ignatian 'spiritual exercises' (*exercita spiritualia*), with the genealogy of these terms found within a Western Christian history, as outlined in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*.<sup>153</sup> Within this history, spirituality is 'the cultivation of the inner life of a religious community, particularly a monastic community', although in modern Western culture Flood recognises that the term denotes 'an individual, private experience'.<sup>154</sup> This

---

<sup>151</sup> Sebastian Brock describes the importance of this Syriac word *rāzā* by the time of the Syrian hymnographer St Ephrem (d. 373 CE), which is best translated as 'mystery' or 'symbol', with the plural *rāzē*, like the Greek *mystēria*, referring to the liturgical Mysteries. 'The word of Persian origin, first appears in Daniel where its primary meaning is that of "secret"; subsequently it occurs in the text of the Qumran community, and very probably it is the Semitic term lying behind St Paul's use of the word *mysterion*.' Syrus Ephraem, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian P. Brock (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1990), 42.

<sup>152</sup> Brock argues for the distinctness of 'Syriac spirituality' from the Greek and Latin traditions. Sebastian P. Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005), 2. Seely Beggiani's book depends heavily on the contributors to the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (see below). Seely J. Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1991), 7.

<sup>153</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 80. Michel Dupuy, "Spiritualité," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique : Doctrine et Histoire*, ed. Marcel Viller, Charles Baumgartner, and André Rayez (Paris: G. Beauchesne et ses fils, 1937), 1142-46. Michel Dupuy begins with the history of the Latin substantive *spiritualitas*, used to translate the Greek *pneumatikos* in the Pauline epistles. The substantive is found frequently in Tertullian (166-225CE), and in both the philosophical and religious senses in thirteenth century authors such as Thomas Aquinas and Albert Magnus (1200-1280CE).

<sup>154</sup> Flood, *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*, 80. These perspectives on spirituality are reflected in G. Widengren's article, in which he compares Isaac of Nineveh's directions for prayer with the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556CE), and then proceeds to argue that Stephen bar Šūdhailē's writings testify to his inner mystical experiences rather than to 'only literary reminiscences of inherited traditions'. G. Widengren, "Researches in Syrian Mysticism: Mystical Experiences and Spiritual Exercises," *Numen* 8, no. 3 (1961): 177-83.

emphasis on personal experience can be seen in the discussions in Syriac studies about whether authors of more literary mystic works such as Stephen bar Šūdhailē and Barhebraeus should really be considered mystics, the deciding point being whether they had an actual experience of the spiritual realities to which they refer.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, even in the close adherence to the terminology of the Syriac tradition, the presuppositions of the Western academic study of mysticism remain widespread in the study of Syriac 'spirituality'. The issue is not to be resolved by finding a better translation of Syriac terms, but in acknowledging the frameworks of the Western academic discipline which has given rise to the cross-cultural classification of such phenomena.

How the pre-understanding of the academic discipline of the study of mysticism can be reconciled with the world of monastic spirituality which Barhebraeus inhabited is thus of major concern. Barhebraeus' mystical texts are understood to follow the conventions of the Syrian tradition of the mystics, a tradition with its own rules and strategies of production. In his reclaiming of Syrian mystic discourse, the hermeneutical operations of Barhebraeus' mysticism are understood to be internally defined, rather than essentialising his contribution according to a phenomenology of mysticism in the abstract. Through the hermeneutical approach, Barhebraeus' mysticism is brought into dialogue with the Western study of mysticism, to offer a revision of the presuppositions of this academic discipline.

---

<sup>155</sup> For the discussion of Barhebraeus as a mystic, see the Introduction to Chapter 4.

## Chapter 3: Locating Barhebraeus Historically – Traditions, Texts and Themes

### Introduction: A Critical Biography

Barhebraeus is a sufficiently celebrated figure to be given a biographical entry across a broad range of modern encyclopaedias, a diversity that reflects his own career as a polymath who specialised in so many different disciplines. That Barhebraeus excelled in so many literary fields, makes it difficult to locate him in a single discipline. Well-known for his ecumenical views towards the other Christian confessions in the Middle East, as well as his openness towards Islam, this outlook led to a tendency to turn to authorities that were less standardly read, in the monastic circles of the West Syrians. However, these distinctive characteristics by no means placed him outside of his tradition, indeed Barhebraeus' more innovative aspects are also highly synthetic in the sense that he borrows from other traditions that were closely related to his own. In considering Barhebraeus' place within Syrian tradition, it seems pertinent to consult the entry on Barhebraeus within the encyclopaedic history of Syriac literature and the sciences, written by the late Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, Mor Ignatius Aphram I Barsoum (1887-1957CE). This Arabic work, published in 1956, was later translated into English by Matti Moosa, for the 2003 edition entitled: *The scattered pearls: a history of Syriac literature and sciences*.<sup>156</sup> Barsoum introduces Barhebraeus as 'one of the great philosophers and theologians of the Orient as well as the world'.<sup>157</sup> Barhebraeus has also been compared to the great scholars of medieval Europe, such as Thomas Aquinas.<sup>158</sup> However, as Hidemi Takahashi states, 'there are no positive indications in Barhebraeus' works (philosophical-theological and historical)

---

<sup>156</sup> Ignatius Aphram Barsoum and Matti Moosa, *The Scattered Pearls : A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, 2nd rev. ed. (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2003).

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>158</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus" (paper presented at the Before and after Avicenna : proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group, Yale University, 2001), 274, n. 73. Takahashi points out that, 'Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) and Barhebraeus (1225/6-1286) are almost exact contemporaries and the date of composition of the Summa -1267-73- too, is very close to that of the Candelabrum'.

that he had any awareness of the developments of Latin Scholastic philosophy'.<sup>159</sup> This is despite the possibility of interaction with Latin Scholasticism during the period of his studies in the Crusader States of the Franks, in Tripoli, Antioch and Cilicia.<sup>160</sup>

That Barhebraeus distinguished himself as an Aristotelian philosopher and as a theologian was hardly without precedent amongst Syrian church leaders; other notable examples include Timothy I (780-823CE) Patriarch of the Church of the East, whose dialogues display his Aristotelian training.<sup>161</sup> Indeed, in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, philosophical learning was located in the monastic centres and it was usual for Syrian church leaders like Barhebraeus to have a monastic background.<sup>162</sup> Athanasius of Balad (d. 686CE) similarly deserves to be mentioned here, a scholar of the monastery of Qennešre, Athanasius became Patriarch of Antioch and thus head of the Syrian Orthodox Church from 683 to 686.<sup>163</sup> Although Athanasius' translations do not survive, his translation of books of Aristotle's *Organon* were sought after by the Patriarch Timothy, when the latter was commissioned to provide an Arabic translation of the *Topics* (the book of dialectics) for the Caliph al-Mahdī (775-785CE).<sup>164</sup> The monastic context for Barhebraeus' philosophy will be explored further in the section on the West Syrian Monastic Curriculum.

---

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 274. Janssens also argues that there is no such evidence for Barhebraeus' awareness of Byzantine scholasticism either. Herman F. Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937), 34.

<sup>160</sup> Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 274. The textual connection is made by Zonta, who notes that 13<sup>th</sup> century Aristotelianism spread amongst Latin scholastics, Hebrew philosophers and amongst the Syriac thinkers in Mesopotamia, though he admits that this process 'is still in need of a reasonable explication'. Mauro Zonta, "Syriac, Hebrew and Latin Encyclopedia in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century: A Comparative Approach to "Medieval Philosophies"" (paper presented at the Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? = Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au Moyen Âge? = What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?, Erfurt, 25-30 August 1997), 928.

<sup>161</sup> Daniel King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," in *History and Identity in the Late Antique near East*, ed. Philip Wood, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69.

<sup>162</sup> For example, in his biographical chapter on Barhebraeus, Nöldeke comments regarding Barhebraeus' ordination as a monk that 'this was doubtless with a view to the episcopal dignity, the higher ecclesiastical charges being in the Oriental Churches accessible only to monks'. Theodor Nöldeke and John Sutherland Black, *Sketches from Eastern History* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 238.

<sup>163</sup> Barsoum and Moosa, *The Scattered Pearls : A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, 331-32.

<sup>164</sup> John W. Watt, "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 4 (2010): 39.



### Biographical Sources for Barhebraeus

Of Barhebraeus' early life, not much is known in any detail, due to the nature of the extant sources. Scholars usually construct a biography for Barhebraeus according to his own writings, principally the chronicle of church history, the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, which forms the second part of his *Chronography* (*Makṭbānūt Zabnē*).<sup>165</sup> However, in keeping with an ecclesiastical history, this concentrates on the details of his career as bishop (of Gubbos, Laḳabhīn and then Aleppo)<sup>166</sup> and his subsequent appointment as Maphrian of the Eastern provinces. In addition, the prelude to the final part of the *Book of the Dove* (*Kṭābā d-yawnā*) provides a short account of his career according to the development of his internal spiritual life. There are also a number of Letters and Poems written by Barhebraeus, which may be used to supplement the accounts provided in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* and the *Book of the Dove*. Since these accounts are quite different in style and length, it is interesting to consider alongside each other the narration of the events of his ecclesiastical career as they appear in the *Book of the Dove* and the *Chronicon*.

The details of the earliest part of Barhebraeus' life come in his Arabic chronicle, the *History of the Dynasties* (*Mukhtaṣar tā'rīkh al-duwal*),<sup>167</sup> and it is recorded there that Barhebraeus was born in Melitene (also known as Malatya), where he lived until the Mongol invasions caused his father Aaron to remove the family to Antioch, then under the control of the Franks.<sup>168</sup> In Antioch, Barhebraeus trained at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate and entered

---

<sup>165</sup> These are translated by Budge in his Introduction to the *Chronography*, which he devotes to the Life and Works of Barhebraeus. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Chronography*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1976), xv-xxvi. The main body of Budge's translation the *Chronography* is actually drawn from Bedjan's edition of Barhebraeus' *Chronicon Syriacum*, often referred to as his secular history as against his ecclesiastical history. Paul Bedjan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum* (Parisii: Maisonneuve, 1890).

<sup>166</sup> Budge, *The Chronography*, xvii-xviii. Budge cites *Chron. Eccl.* Section 1, for Barhebraeus' transfer to Laḳabhīn and then to Aleppo in 1253. J. B. Abbeloos and Thomas Joseph Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, 2 vols. (Lovanii (Belgium): C. Peeters, 1872), I:685, 721.

<sup>167</sup> Gregory John Bar Hebraeus, *Historia Compendiosa Dynastiarum, Arab. ed. & Lat. Versa ab E. Pocockio* (Oxon.1663), 487\*, 319. The Arabic text was first edited and translated into Latin by Edward Pococke, in which Volume 1 contains the Arabic text, and Volume 2 the Latin translation.

<sup>168</sup> Weltecke's article places this move in the historical context of the Syriac Orthodox patriarchate in Antioch. Dorothea Weltecke, "On the Syriac Orthodox in the Principality of Antioch During the Crusader Period" (paper presented at the East and West in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean I : Antioch from the Byzantine Reconquest until the end of the Crusader Principality, Leuven, 2003), 120.

the monastic vocation aged seventeen, in order to live the hermetic life.<sup>169</sup> Along with another student, Barhebraeus records in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* that he studied rhetoric and medicine in Tripoli with a rhetor or *mlilō* from the Church of the East.<sup>170</sup> Theodor Nöldeke suggested that this training under a Nestorian 'may have had something to do with the tolerance which he afterwards showed to different creed', though he also admitted that it was not unusual for Syrians to attend lectures of someone whom they considered to be 'heretical'.<sup>171</sup> However, in terms of Barhebraeus' own stated views, he did not consider the Christology of the Church of the East to be heretical, though he held it to be inferior to the position maintained by the Syrian Orthodox. While Barhebraeus' views certainly became increasingly ecumenical in the later stages of his life, even in his more apologetical works, he never states that he considered the other confessions to entertain heretical beliefs, despite their deep Christological divisions. His stance comes in marked contrast to the views held by his predecessors, such as the Syrian Orthodox monk Severus Jacob Bar Šakko (d. 1240-1CE), who also, it might be added, began his philosophical studies under a 'Nestorian' teacher, John bar Zō'bī, then continued under the Muslim philosopher Kamāl al-Din Mūsā ibn Yūnus (1156-1242CE).<sup>172</sup>

The phenomenon of Syrian Orthodox monks training under East Syrian rhetors, would testify to the Graeco-Syriac philosophical tradition shared by West and East Syrians alike. It has already been mentioned, how in a much earlier period, Patriarch Timothy I was obliged to turn to the monasteries of the West Syrians to obtain Syriac translations from the Greek books of the *Organon* that he required.<sup>173</sup> This would indicate the shared basis of the East

---

<sup>169</sup> Budge cites the source of this information as one of Barhebraeus' poems: Codex Vat. No. CLXXIV (Catal. iii. p. 356), No. 29. Budge, *The Chronography*, xvii.

<sup>170</sup> Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, I:667-68. Weltecke suggests that Antioch was too provincial and hence the departure of Barhebraeus to continue his studies at Tripoli. Weltecke, "On the Syriac Orthodox in the Principality of Antioch During the Crusader Period," 120-21.

<sup>171</sup> Nöldeke and Black, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 238.

<sup>172</sup> Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 280. This information is given by Barhebraeus in the *Chronicon*. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II:409-12.

<sup>173</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *From Antagonism to Assimilation : Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning* (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1980), 23. 'It was no doubt a sign of the decline of interest among his fellow churchmen in Aristotelian studies in the late eighth century that Timothy I had to suggest that inquiries about commentaries on the *Topics* and later books of the *Organon* should covertly be directed to the Syrian

and West Syrian interest in Aristotelian logic, even if relations between these scholastic traditions of Graeco-Syriac philosophy were not actively maintained. Daniel King has suggested that while there was little common ground in their reading of the Church Fathers, the notable exception being Basil of Caesarea, the works of Aristotle were a significant shared authority.<sup>174</sup>

Barhebraeus' autobiographical introduction to the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove* begins by recounting how he spent his early years studying the Holy Scriptures and the church fathers under an excellent teacher.<sup>175</sup> Later, he was pressed into a position of responsibility in the church, apparently with some reluctance for he states that at the age of twenty, he was 'compelled' by the Patriarch 'to receive the dignity of bishop'.<sup>176</sup> It may be surmised that his early vocation of the hermetic life, devoted to the monastic prayers and vigils of the cell, would have been quite different to the duties and responsibilities of his ecclesiastical office. George Lane has suggested that this ascetic life of meditations and mysticism is precisely what had to be relinquished on Barhebraeus' appointment as bishop of Gubbos and his entering into 'the worldly affairs of the Syrian Orthodox Church'.<sup>177</sup> While this might be implied retrospectively from his attitude to the solitary life in the *Ethicon* (*Ktābā d-īthiqōn*) and the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus himself supplies no further

---

Orthodox monastery of Mar Mattai (near Mosul). Brock provides a translation of these enquiries of Timothy's, directed to Mar Pethion, from *Letter 43*: 'Enquiries on this should be directed to the monastery of Mar Mattai – but they should not be made too eagerly, lest the information, (the purpose of the enquiry) being perceived, be kept hidden.' "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1999): 236.

<sup>174</sup> Daniel King responds to Tannous's chapter of the same volume, in his *Postscript*: 'he makes the point effectively that while Bar 'Idta read Nestorius and Jacob read Philoxenus, both read Basil. But we could easily replace Basil with Aristotle.' King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 81. For the designation of Aristotle and the pagan philosophers as 'outsiders' by Barhebraeus in the *Book of Directions*, see Jack Tannous' comments in the later section, The Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Qennešre.

<sup>175</sup> For the classification of this passage as autobiographical, see for example Samir Khalil's analysis the passage accordingly in Part 2: 'Le récit autobiographique d'Ibn al-'Ibri'. Samir Khalil Samir, S.J., "Cheminement Mystique d'Ibn al-'Ibri (1226-1286)," *Proche-Orient Chretien* 37 (1987): 75. See also his subsequent article in this vein: "Un Récit Autobiographique d'Ibn al-'Ibri," *Dirāsāt* 15 (1988).

<sup>176</sup> A. J. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon* (Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1919), 60, 577\*.

<sup>177</sup> George Lane, "An Account of Gregory Bar Hebraeus Abu Al-Faraj and His Relations with the Mongols of Persia," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999 [2010]): 216.

information on the apparently sudden transition to his role as bishop.<sup>178</sup> In the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, he records simply that he was ordained bishop by Patriarch Ignatius II, along with his fellow student of rhetoric Ṣalībḥā Bar Yaʿkūb Wagīḥ (who became bishop of Akko), and that on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 1246, he became bishop of Gubbos.<sup>179</sup> In the corresponding section of the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus states that his appointment as bishop forced him to become engaged in 'disquisitions and disputations with the heads of other confessions, interior and exterior'.<sup>180</sup> However the experience of being involved in inter-confessional disputations, led him to the conclusion that all such differences between the Christian confessions on matters of Christology were of no real substance, and that he forsook such practices, though this clearly did not result in the resignation of his ecclesiastical career.<sup>181</sup>

The story of Barhebraeus' spiritual life does not figure in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* at all, as might be expected of a historical compendium where he supplies ample details of his attempt and apparent success in maintaining good relations with the leading figures of the Church of the East.<sup>182</sup> In terms of his relations with Muslims, Barhebraeus' brother Barṣawmā tells how he produced an Arabic version of his Syriac chronicle of secular history (i.e. not including his volumes of church history), entitled the *Mukhtaṣar tā'rīkh al-duwal*, on the request of Muslim scholars in the circle of al-Ṭūsī at Marāgha.<sup>183</sup> While

---

<sup>178</sup> Lane refers to the Introduction of the *Book of the Dove* in this context, though it was written at the end of Barhebraeus' ecclesiastical career and long after the initial three-year period of his monastic life. Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, I:667-70. The date of 1246 coincided precisely with the day of the Festival of the Redeeming Cross. This is also narrated by Budge in his Introduction to the *Chronicon Syriacum*. Budge, *The Chronography*, xvii.

<sup>180</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 60, 577\*.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 60, 577-78\*.

<sup>182</sup> Budge translates a long section from Barhebraeus' appointment as Maphrian to his final illness, in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* Section II, proceeding from column 432. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II:432f. There are many such episodes in this section, but here is one example of the good relations between the Maphrian and the Church of the East, recorded as the summer of 1588 (1277CE): 'Now before the Maphrian went into BAGHDĀD he sent and informed Archdeacon THOMAS [of his coming], and he informed the Catholicos MĀR DENḤĀ, and he sent bishops and many BAGHDĀD noblemen to meet the Maphrian, and when he went into him he honoured him greatly on the roadside. And he turned to the great crowd of JACOBITES and NESTORIANS and said unto them, 'Blessed are the people whom he thus hath.' Budge, *The Chronography*, xxiv.

<sup>183</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, "The Mathematical Sciences in Syriac: From Sergius of Resh-'Aina and Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus and Patriarch Ni'matallah," *Annals of Science* 68, no. 4 (2011): 486. In his introduction to the

Barhebraeus moved around considerably in his role as Maphrian of the East, his official residence was at the Monastery of Mar Mattai, near to Mosul, in the region of Nineveh.<sup>184</sup> He also sojourned in Tabrīz and Marāgha in Persian Azerbaijan; Marāgha had an observatory and extensive library that had been established by the Persian Islamic scholar al-Ṭūsī.<sup>185</sup> In the preface to the *Chronography*, Barhebraeus mentions his recourse to the Il-Khans' library of Marāgha, where he had 'loaded up this my little book with narratives which are worthy of remembrance' from the volumes of the Syrians, Arabs and Persians.<sup>186</sup> Takahashi suggests that Barhebraeus made at least four prolonged visits to Marāgha during the period of his maphrianate.<sup>187</sup> According to the dating of the works completed there by Barhebraeus, these visits would correspond with his 'lecture' in 1268 on Euclid's *Elements* and then again in 1272 on Ptolemy's *Almagest*. A more extended period might be placed in 1279 when he completed the *Ethicon*, until he moved to Tabrīz in 1282, and his final stay in Marāgha was in 1286, when his death prevented him from completing the Arabic history.<sup>188</sup>

#### Ecumenical Relations with the East Syrians

During his temporary residency in Marāgha,<sup>189</sup> Barhebraeus seems to have been on cordial terms with the East Syrian Patriarch, who also resided in Marāgha during the same

---

*Chronography*, Budge provides a translation of Baršawmā's version of events concerning Barhebraeus' final departure to Marāgha. 'And when he was living there, honoured by both great and small, the foremost men among the ARABS asked him to turn the Chronography which he had composed in Syriac into the Saracenic language so that they also might read and enjoy it. To this the Maphrian agreed, and straightaway he began to turn the [book into Arabic] in noble and exceedingly eloquent language. [He worked] for a month of days, until he had very nearly finished it, and there remained of it [untranslated] perhaps three folios.' Budge, *The Chronography*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>184</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, *Barhebraeus: A Bio-Bibliography*, 1st Gorgias Press ed. (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>185</sup> "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001 [2010]): 73, n. 89 and 90.

<sup>186</sup> Budge, *The Chronography*, 2.

<sup>187</sup> Takahashi, "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 81, n. 104.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. The dating of these works are from Takahashi's *Bio-Bibliography*, and are given in the chronology of Barhebraeus' main works in Appendix 1. They also correspond with the details that Takahashi gives of Barhebraeus' four trips to Tabrīz and Marāgha (see n. 104 of his article), from Section II of the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* covering the period from 1262 to his death in 1286. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II:441-74.

<sup>189</sup> Takahashi, "The Mathematical Sciences in Syriac: From Sergius of Resh-'Aina and Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus and Patriarch Ni'matallah," 485.

period.<sup>190</sup> In this climate of mutual respect, the various Christian communities of that city, including the Greeks and Armenians, assembled together for the funeral of Barhebraeus in 1286. The ordinances given by the East Syrian Patriarch Yahballaha for the funeral were appended by Barhebraeus' brother Barṣawmā to the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*:<sup>191</sup>

And because MÂR YABH 'ALLÂHÂ, the praiseworthy Catholicus, was at that time in the city of MARÂGHÂ, he commanded that no man should go to business in the bazar, and that no man should open [his] shop. And he sent out a beater of a board (i.e. bell-ringer), and all the people gathered together at the cell of the Maphrian. And the Catholicus sent the bishops who were with him, and many large candles, and a whole crowd of ARMENIANS and GREEKS were there, but of our own community only four Elders were present.

The manner in which Barhebraeus was celebrated at his funeral, points to the special nature of his relation as Maphrian with the East Syrians. As Maphrian of the Eastern provinces of the Syrian Orthodox church, Barhebraeus made many visits to cities such as Baghdad in order to sustain the priesthood with further ordinations.<sup>192</sup> However the Church of the East had a much more sizeable presence amongst the Christian populations distributed across Persia and Azerbaijan.<sup>193</sup> It would therefore have been of some strategic importance that in his role as Maphrian he sought to nurture good relations with leading ecclesiastical figures of the Church of the East. Takahashi suggests that Barhebraeus saw unity amongst Syrian Christians as 'indispensable' to making the most of the 'pro-Christian attitude' of the Mongols.<sup>194</sup>

*Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* records Barhebraeus' interaction with Patriarchs Mar Denḥā I (1265-1281CE) and Mar Yahballaha III (1281-1317CE).<sup>195</sup> Florence Jullien has argued for the apologetic approach of Barhebraeus in his correspondence with Mar Denḥā, in which Barhebraeus upheld an anti-diophysite position against that of the Patriarch, defending it

---

<sup>190</sup> Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography, 26.

<sup>191</sup> Budge, *The Chronography*, xxx.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., xxi-xxii.

<sup>193</sup> This point is made by Nöldeke. See Nöldeke and Black, *Sketches from Eastern History*, 244. Nöldeke also explains that the title maphrian, or 'mafriyáná' in Syriac, means "the fructifier", that is 'the one who spreads the Church by instituting priests and bishops'.

<sup>194</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 52.

<sup>195</sup> See the examples already listed, as cited by Budge in his Introduction. Budge, *The Chronography*, xxiv, xxx.

through the deployment of traditional Christological arguments based on the Greek Patristics.<sup>196</sup> However, Barhebraeus also invited Mar Denḥā to overcome the historic Christological differences between Cyril and Nestorius that continued to divide the two churches.<sup>197</sup> He also demonstrated a great respect for the apostolicity of the East Syrian tradition, in his reference to the history of the East Syrian patriarchs in this correspondence. Jullien has surmised that in the second part of his Letter, he uses the section of the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* dedicated to the primates of the Orient as his model.<sup>198</sup> The scope of the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* shows a more ecumenical attitude, in covering the history of the West Syrian Patriarchs in the first part, and the West Syrian Maphrians and the East Syrian Patriarchs in the second part.<sup>199</sup> Sebastian Brock has pointed out that this inclusion of East Syrian ecclesiastical history is unique in the genre of Syrian Orthodox chronicles, and thus Barhebraeus had to draw much of his material on the East Syrian Patriarchs from the chronicle tradition of the Church of the East, notably the twelfth-century source of Mari ibn Suleiman.<sup>200</sup>

That Barhebraeus' attitude to the Church of the East is not without precedent may be seen by comparison with other figures in his tradition. Herman Teule has compared the attitudes of four figures of the Syrian Orthodox Church from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, beginning with Al-Arfādī. Teule has adopted the latter's surprisingly ecumenical statement as the title of his article 'It is not right to call ourselves Orthodox and the others heretics'.<sup>201</sup> Teule suggests that Al-Arfādī's remarkable openness 'may have prepared the way for later Jacobite believers to adopt a likewise open attitude to heterodox believers,

---

<sup>196</sup> Florence Jullien, "Une Question de Controverse Religieuse: la Lettre au Catholicos Nestorien Mār Denḥā I" *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008), 100-03.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 104-05.

<sup>199</sup> The *Letter to Catholicos Denḥā I* must therefore post-date the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, but Takahashi suggests that the dating of the Letter to 1593 (1281/2CE) is problematic since the Catholicos died on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1592. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 52, n. 231. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II:451-52.

<sup>200</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 23.

<sup>201</sup> In terms of dating, Teule suggests that he probably lived in the eleventh or twelfth century. Herman Teule, *"It Is Not Right to Call Ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics: Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusades"* (paper presented at the East and West in the Crusader States : Context - Contacts - Confrontations II, Hernen Castle, Netherlands, 1997), 14.

including the Franks'.<sup>202</sup> However, unlike his near Syrian Orthodox contemporaries, only Barhebraeus follows a similar line of thinking, whilst both Bar Ṣalībī and Bar Šakko proffer very pointed criticisms of such ecumenical statements. Bar Ṣalībī discussed the four main Christological traditions in his book of disputation, dismissing all but the Syrian Orthodox position as heretical.<sup>203</sup> This work directs polemic not only against non-Christians i.e. Muslims and Jews, but also other Christians, including the Nestorians, the Byzantines and even the Armenians, though Teule comments that surprisingly this does not include the Franks.<sup>204</sup> Teule suggests that for Barhebraeus the Chalcedonians and the other non-Chalcedonian churches escape the judgment of heresy, 'since their Christology only differs from the Jacobites' in terminology, not in substance'.<sup>205</sup>

Barhebraeus' attitude, reiterated in the *Book of the Dove*, would thus seem to reflect his 'Jacobite' forebear, Al-Arfādī. In this short Arabic treatise on 'the concordance in faith among the Christians and the essence of religions (*kitāb ijtimā' al-amānā wa-'unsūr addiyāna*)', he states that in their 'underlying meaning (*ma'na*)' the main Christian communities are in fact in agreement concerning the christologies which divide them.<sup>206</sup> These statements of Al-Arfādī correspond closely to the conclusions reached by Barhebraeus, that the quarrels between the confessions concern terminology (*kūnnāyē*) over and above substance. Barhebraeus concluded in the *Book of the Dove*, that 'these quarrels of Christians among themselves are not a matter of facts but of words and denominations' - that is, a quarrel over *mellē w-kūnnāyē*.<sup>207</sup> This attitude is similarly displayed in Barhebraeus' chapter *On Incarnation*, which forms the fourth 'base' or 'foundation' of his theological summa the *Candelabrum*. Wolfgang Hage's article 'Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology', shows how Barhebraeus deliberately

---

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 14-15. Al-Arfādī also refers to the agreement of meaning in Christology in this treatise.

<sup>207</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 60, 577\*.



refrained from including the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian confessions in his 'Index of Heresies', which comes at the end of this Christological chapter.<sup>208</sup>

The other groups flourishing nowadays in the world only dispute over the definition of the union (in Christ), because all of them agree in the doctrines of Trinity and of the preservation of the natures out of which Christ (was made), without change and mixture.<sup>209</sup>

Barhebraeus continues by outlining the three main Christological positions for these groups, represented by the Jacobites (along with the other Oriental Orthodox), the Nestorians, and 'the middle course' taken by the Chalcedonians, which included the Greeks, the Franks and the Maronites.<sup>210</sup> Whilst Hage emphasised the ecumenical tone of these statements, which he proposed 'is a quite new one in the Syrian Orthodox tradition', Teule has shown the possible background to this ecumenism within Barhebraeus' tradition.

Takahashi has suggested that there may well have been a pragmatic element to Barhebraeus' ecumenism, in that 'Nestorian' Christians occupied the more influential positions in the court of the Mongols, rather than the Syrian Orthodox.<sup>211</sup> However, he sees no reason to doubt the ecumenical convictions of Barhebraeus as they are expressed at the end of his life in the *Dove*.<sup>212</sup> It seems that Barhebraeus' ecumenism, while it was formulated within the religious and political environment of his day, descended from his attitude to the influence of Greek epistemological reasoning on the conduct of inter-

---

<sup>208</sup> Wolfgang Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology," *The Harp : A Review of Syriac and Oriental Studies* IV, no. 1, 2, 3 (1991): 108. The Syriac text for the Index of Heresies is edited and translated into French by François Nau, II.18: 'Les hérésies christologiques d'après Grégoire Bar Hébraeus'. François Nau, *Documents Pour Servir a L'histoire de l'Église Nestorienne*, Patrologia Orientalis (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919), 252-65.

<sup>209</sup> Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology," 108. Hage translates this passage from the conclusion to Barhebraeus' Index of Heresies in Nau's Syriac edition. Nau, *Documents Pour Servir a L'histoire de l'Église Nestorienne*, 263-65.

<sup>210</sup> Hage, "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology," 108.

<sup>211</sup> Takahashi gives the example of Doquz Khatun, consort to Hulagu, whom Barhebraeus refers to as the 'believing Christian Queen', in the *Chronography*. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 52, n. 232. Bedjan, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum*, 491.15f, 509.21f, 21.16.

<sup>212</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 52.

confessional relations in the Syrian Orient.<sup>213</sup> Barhebraeus' understanding of the epistemological problem of the incorporation of Greek logic into religious disputation (Syr. *durrāšā*) was an attitude that developed over the course of his career and this will be explored further in a subsequent section of this chapter.<sup>214</sup>

## Barhebraeus' Contribution to a Syriac Revival

Barhebraeus produced works ranging from grammar to humorous anecdotes, but his underlying methods of systematisation were highly philosophical. Takahashi has advocated a strong case for Barhebraeus' philosophical credentials, pointing out that despite comments in the *Book of the Dove* where he would seem to renounce Greek philosophy in fact he never gave up the writing of philosophy. Indeed it was a compendium of Aristotelian philosophy, the *Cream of Wisdom* (*Ḥêwat Ḥekmtā*), which formed his last completed work in February 1286, only six months before his death.<sup>215</sup> Barhebraeus made some of his most significant contributions to the Syrian Renaissance period in the realm of philosophy, particularly in his translation and appropriation of Islamic philosophical texts. In this he did not simply perform the role of a translator of Islamic philosophy, but drew on Aristotelian philosophy throughout many of his other writings, including the theological and mystical. Thus, a theological work like his *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* (*Mnārat qudshē*) contains brief expositions of Aristotelian philosophy; its section on the *Hexaemeron* draws on the zoology of the Aristotelian books of natural science.<sup>216</sup>

---

<sup>213</sup> Takahashi also argues for the development of Barhebraeus' ecumenism, but points to the problem of dating all of Barhebraeus' ecumenical 'gestures', particularly the letter to Mar Denḥā, in order to accurately chart this development in Barhebraeus' thought. Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> See the sub-section on The Centrality of Aristotelian Logic within the final section of this chapter.

<sup>215</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," in *The Letter before the Spirit: The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, ed. Aafke M. I. van Oppenraaij and Resianne Fontaine, Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 0927-4103 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 114.

<sup>216</sup> H. J. Drossaart Lulofs, *On the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Philosophia Antiqua (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), x. Lulofs suggests that Barhebraeus' source here was the Syriac version of Nicolaus Damascenus on Aristotle rather than Aristotle's *Historia animalium* itself, cf. J. Bakoš, "Le Candélabre des Sanctuaires de Grégoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus," *Patrologia Orientalis* XXII (1933).

One of Barhebraeus' most notable achievements was his reappropriation of the full corpus of Aristotelian philosophy for the Syrians, which was realised through his reading of the Avicennan and post-Avicennan philosophical tradition in Arabic. In Ernest Wallis Budge's translation of Bedjan's Syriac text of the *Chronicon Syriacum*, Barhebraeus stated:

And there arose among them philosophers, and mathematicians, and physicians, who surpassed the ancient [sages] in the exactness of their knowledge. The only foundations on which they set up their buildings were Greek houses; the wisdom-buildings (or, science-buildings) which they erected were great by reason of their highly polished diction, and their greatly skilled researches (or investigations). Thus it hath happened that we from they (ie. the GREEKS) have acquired wisdom through translators, all of whom are SYRIANS, have been compelled to ask for wisdom from them.<sup>217</sup>

This passage occurs near the beginning of Barhebraeus' tenth section that is devoted to the history of the 'Kings of the Arabs'. Here, Barhebraeus admires the foundations of the Arab sciences, in that they have been built solely through the investigation into Greek wisdom, and thus suggests that his own interest in the Arab sciences is due entirely to their Greek 'foundations'. Barhebraeus and his near-contemporaries, felt compelled to revive this aspect that appears to have fallen into neglect in the Syrian tradition. Takahashi has also suggested that Barhebraeus' revival of the Greek disciplines of learning through his extensive translation and composition of scientific literature was for the purpose of promoting cultural 'prestige' in this new situation of religious favour for the Syriac-speaking Christians under Ilkhanid rule. He maintains that Barhebraeus and other religious leaders would have perceived the fall of Baghdad in 1258 to the Mongols as instigating something of a new religious and political order, one 'which was not dominated by Islam and in which the Syriac-speaking Christians too were given the opportunity, for the first time in centuries, to compete with the other races for positions of prominence.'<sup>218</sup> The significance of this 'new world order' for the Syrians in Takahashi's opinion is indicated by the structure of Barhebraeus' *Chronicon Syriacum*, in which the fall of the 'Abbāsid caliphate forms the final event in his section on the kings of the Arabs and thus heralds the

---

<sup>217</sup> Budge, *The Chronography*, 92, 98\*. The second page reference [\*] is to Bedjan's Syriac text which Budge reproduces in Volume II, while providing his own translation into English in Volume I.

<sup>218</sup> Takahashi, "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 79-80.

new order of the Mongol Khans.<sup>219</sup> The intellectual revival of the Syrian tradition served a political purpose, in which Barhebraeus played such an instrumental part through his literary, political and ecumenical activities. However, irrespective of any potential political motivations, Barhebraeus made a significant and profound contribution to this intellectual revival.

#### The Revival of Philosophy and the Notion of a 'Renaissance'

The literary achievements of Barhebraeus have often been evaluated according to the notion that the Syrians were undergoing a 'Renaissance' in the thirteenth century. Thus, the literary endeavours of Barhebraeus have usually been seen as marking the culmination of the achievements of the Syrian Renaissance, followed by a cultural decline. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Barsoum placed Barhebraeus at the very end of what he calls the 'Second Period' in the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church, extending from around 660 to 1290.<sup>220</sup> However, the notion of a Syrian or Syriac 'Renaissance' promulgated in Syriac studies, brings with it a model of revival that appears inappropriate for an intellectual culture that remained very much centred on the monasteries. Instead of being a renaissance period, Syrian intellectual culture may be interpreted as a 'scholastic' one, with distinct parallels, and even some direct links through the Frankish city of Antioch, to the development of scholasticism in the Latin West.<sup>221</sup> In the Syrian medieval period, a similar interaction occurred with the Islamic sciences, with the translation or incorporation of the Arabic Aristotelian tradition into Syriac by Barhebraeus and his immediate predecessors.

Dorothea Weltecke in her chapter for the volume *The Syriac Renaissance*, 'A Renaissance in Historiography?', frames her article by questioning the application of the notion of a *renaissance* to Syriac culture.<sup>222</sup> She argues that following Baumstark, scholars were keen

---

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>220</sup> Barsoum and Moosa, *The Scattered Pearls : A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, 463-81.

<sup>221</sup> See further the article by Charles Burnett propounding the central role of Antioch. Charles Burnett, "Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin Culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," in *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages : The Translators and Their Intellectual and Social Context*, ed. Charles Burnett, Collected Studies (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>222</sup> Dorothea Weltecke, "A Renaissance in Historiography? Patriarch Michael, the Anonymous Chronicle Ad A. 1234, and Bar Ebroyo," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G. B Teule, et al., Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

to emphasise the achievements of this period by using the term 'Syrian Renaissance', rather than degrading these twelfth and thirteenth century authors 'as mere epigones in a long period of decay since the 6<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>223</sup> However the very European conception of a 'Renaissance' inherits the assumptions of its renaissance scholars, specifically the myth of an oppressive Church, which prevented the progress of science and rationality.<sup>224</sup> As Weltecke points out, this 'myth' was entirely absent from the Syriac orthodox chronographers, who were engaged in the medieval monastic genre of writing chronicles that the humanist scholars of the European Renaissance despised so completely.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, Weltecke argues that there was no comparable attempt to return to the classical texts without the 'scholastic' distortion, nor was there such an idealisation of a 'classical' period that could then serve Michael the Syrian or Barhebraeus with an authoritative model for restoration.<sup>226</sup>

Weltecke's comments have been made in the context of historiography, but are equally pertinent to other fields, as are the modern presuppositions that have been projected by European scholars onto the very different cultural world of the Syrians. In the same volume, N. Peter Joosse states in his chapter on the '*Structure and Sources of Bar Hebraeus' 'Practical Philosophy' in The Cream of Wisdom*', that Barhebraeus must have used only Arabic sources for his section on practical philosophy since the Syriac versions were too deficient and traditional in content; stating that,

They stood in the way of progress and would have caused a standstill, which in its turn would have introduced a period of decline, where a period of revival and Renaissance of Syrian arts, culture, and sciences was hoped and wished for.<sup>227</sup>

The underlying reason for Joosse's position would seem to lie in his strong belief in a notion of renaissance, whereby the Syrian tradition had become the distortive lens which needed to be cleared aside in order to return to the more classical Aristotle, preserved in

---

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> N. Peter Joosse, "Expounding on a Theme: Structure and Sources of Barhebraeus," in *The Syriac Renaissance*, ed. Herman G. B. Teule, Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 141.

the Arabic. Joosse states that Barhebraeus seldom quoted directly from his main Persian source for the summary of Aristotelian practical philosophy, despite his extensive use of Nasīr al-dīn al-Ṭūsī's (b. 1201CE) *Nasirean Ethics*.<sup>228</sup> He maintains that Barhebraeus' summary also draws on other works in Arabic, but that he did not have access to the Syriac versions of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, such as the *Summa Alexandrinorum* or *De virtutibus*.<sup>229</sup> By contrast, Takahashi has drawn attention to the clear philological connections specifically between Barhebraeus' *Ethics* and the wording of the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Aristotelian text, *De virtutibus*.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, rather than being dismissive of the Syriac tradition of Aristotle, Barhebraeus used it to supplement the Avicennan tradition.

Barhebraeus' extensive use of Islamic philosophy was remarkable but not without precedent. Already in the medieval period, Bar Šakko had made considerable use of Islamic philosophical learning in his Syriac works.<sup>231</sup> The inter-relation of the Syriac and Arabic traditions of philosophy had been established with the translation movements of the ninth and tenth centuries, when Syrian Christian scholars used the Syriac translations as a medium through which to transmit Greek philosophy into Arabic during the 'Abbāsīd era.<sup>232</sup> From the tenth century the Islamic philosophical tradition came to predominate, with Arabic displacing Syriac 'as the language of science'.<sup>233</sup> In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a revival of interest amongst Syrian scholastics such as Barhebraeus in

---

<sup>228</sup> A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), *Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2004), 3.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 207-15. Joosse maintains that Zonta was wrong to assume that Barhebraeus made use of the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De virtutibus*, but rather relied on the Arabic version of Abū Qurra. Cf.

Mauro Zonta, "Structure and Sources of Bar-Hebraeus' "Practical Philosophy" in *the Cream of Science*" (paper presented at the Symposium Syriacum VII, Uppsala, 1996), 285-92.

<sup>230</sup> Takahashi argues for 'the almost exact agreement' between a sentence in Barhebraeus' book of *Ethics* (III.iv.4), and in the abridged Syriac version of *De virtutibus* in Ms. Sinai Syr. 14. Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 117 n. 22. Takahashi suggests Barhebraeus may well have used the Syriac *Summa Alexandrinorum*, but as Joosse points out, both the Syriac version and the Greek original are lost.

<sup>231</sup> Takahashi calls Bar Šakko a 'precursor' to Barhebraeus, but affirms the extensive usage of Islamic sources by Barhebraeus was 'exceptional'. *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 98.

<sup>232</sup> John W. Watt, "Greek Philosophy and Syriac Culture in 'Abbasid Iraq," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq : Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*, ed. Erica C. D. Hunter, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 10-11.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 13.

the Greek sciences. While the Syriac revival of this tradition of philosophy was characteristic of this period, it also defined Barhebraeus' own particular achievements. For Teule, this period of intellectual revival had two principal foundations, which were, openness to the Islamic sciences and a spirit of ecumenism between the different Christian confessions of the Syrians.<sup>234</sup> He has proposed that these two orientations of the 'Syriac Renaissance' contribute to a better understanding of Barhebraeus' thought.<sup>235</sup>

#### Rationale to Barhebraeus' Literary Activities

In the debate surrounding Barhebraeus' contribution to Syrian intellectual culture, Teule has advocated that Barhebraeus was not simply a scholarly 'compiler' and transmitter of other works, but also made 'original' contributions.<sup>236</sup> He characterizes this originality on the basis of Barhebraeus' 'extensive use' of Islamic religious thought and his ability to look beyond the borders of his own Syrian Orthodox community. He maintains that this can only be truly established with regard to his sources by investigating 'whether he follows classical patterns or selects, discovers – or rediscovers – writings, ignored by his contemporaries or immediate predecessors'.<sup>237</sup> Barhebraeus certainly displayed significant originality in his use of sources; it has not so far been suggested that Barhebraeus made original contributions to philosophical thought. Moreover scholars have commented that the Syrian tradition did not excel in this regard, especially when compared to Arabic philosophy.<sup>238</sup> The appraisal offered by Joosse in his introduction to Barhebraeus' books of practical philosophy from the *Cream of Wisdom* is that, 'Although Barhebraeus may not have been an original thinker, he is without doubt one of the most excellent compilers of all

---

<sup>234</sup> Herman Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo" (paper presented at the Actes du Colloque VIII Patrimoine syriaque, Antélias-Beyrouth, 2002), 260-1.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>236</sup> This perspective on Barhebraeus was held by 'older scholars' such as Nau, Rubens Duval and Jean Baptiste Chabot. "Christian Spiritual Sources in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus," *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 (2008): 333 n. 2.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>238</sup> Brock comments 'that although Greek influence on Syriac culture was far greater than it ever was to be on Arabic, the conjunction of Greek and Semitic failed to spark any creative genius among Syriac writers as it undoubtedly did among later Arab thinkers'. Brock, *From Antagonism to Assimilation : Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning*, 30.

times.<sup>239</sup> In doing so, Joosse takes an alternative view to that of Teule on the extent of Barhebraeus' originality. This may be in part due to the works on which they have directed their scholarship; Joosse has focussed on Barhebraeus' philosophical works, which collate and summarise materials from a variety of sources. Teule has written most extensively on the writings concerned with monastic spirituality, the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove*, which are much less encyclopaedic in nature than the various compendia of Aristotelian philosophy.

Takahashi has devoted a section of the *Bio-Bibliography* (I.2.6) to considering the purpose behind Barhebraeus' literary activity, maintaining that Barhebraeus was clearly motivated by his role as a pastor in his theological, liturgical and jurisprudential works, whereas in his historical tomes he followed the tradition of historiography that was particularly distinguished by the chronicles of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs, Dionysius of Tell-Mahre (818-845CE) and Michael I (1166-1199CE).<sup>240</sup> Several of his other works, such as his *Arabic History of the Dynasties*, were composed in response to a particular request from some quarter.<sup>241</sup> Takahashi cites the well-known comment of Barhebraeus in the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary*, concerning the lack of Syrian interest in intellectual activity, for '...the field of wisdom has grown waste, the love of wisdom has become cold; its fire has been extinguished and its light has grown dark'.<sup>242</sup> However, Takahashi considers this a literary *topos*, since it is similarly deployed in the *Chronicon* as the reason for undertaking its composition. Indeed, Barhebraeus complains in the Preface to the *Chronicon Syriacum* that the tradition of historiography had been neglected since Michael I.<sup>243</sup> Takahashi has found unsatisfactory the idea that Barhebraeus' choice of subjects was merely haphazard,

---

<sup>239</sup> Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 3.

<sup>240</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 99.

<sup>241</sup> Takahashi shows that at least two of Barhebraeus' Syriac works were commissioned by Rabban Simeon, the *Ascent of the mind* and the translation of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 68.

<sup>242</sup> *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 100. Takahashi cites Barhebraeus' *Candelabrum*, Base I, 24.11f from the Syriac text edited by Ján Bakoš. Bakoš, "Le Candélabre des Sanctuaires de Grégoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus," 510.

<sup>243</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 100, n.382. For Barhebraeus' *Preface*, see: Budge, *The Chronography*, 1-2.



and suggests that he made a more systematic attempt to make all branches of knowledge, especially Arabic scholarship, available in Syriac.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, Barhebraeus points to the literary patronage especially of his Syriac works, by Rabban Simeon, the Syrian Orthodox physician to the Ilkhanid court (1260-1289CE).<sup>245</sup> He is described by Barhebraeus, in his Preface to the astronomical treatise, the *Ascent of the mind* (*Sullāqā hawnānāyā*), as 'one who, in our palaces, rebuilds on the ruins of the sciences and one who renews the ancient disciplines in our age'.<sup>246</sup> Takahashi has speculated that Barhebraeus saw Rabban Simeon as 'a renewer of those ancient disciplines' that he considered so shamefully neglected in Syriac scientific literature.<sup>247</sup> This would give an additional political dimension to the composition of Barhebraeus' scientific works, in furthering the literary prestige of the Syriac language over Arabic.

## Barhebraeus' Engagement with Greek Philosophy

On the basis of Barhebraeus' own testimony, scholars have emphasised his interest in Greek learning which led him to turn to the achievements of the Islamic sciences. However, this general explanation does not do sufficient justice to the transitions which seem to have occurred in Barhebraeus' intellectual life, or at least according to his own account of it, in the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove*. Here Barhebraeus recounts how he made a thorough study of all that was necessary for him to master the disciplines of the Greek sciences,<sup>248</sup> an endeavour which is reflected in his substantial philosophical literary output. His disillusionment with this study to the point of a crisis in faith, would indicate that Greek philosophy posed a particular problematic for Barhebraeus in his understanding of God,

---

<sup>244</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 100.

<sup>245</sup> "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 68-81.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 80. This translation into English is given by Takahashi from Nau's Syriac text. François Nau, *Le Livre de L'ascension de L'esprit sur la Forme du Ciel et de la Terre : Cours D'astronomie Rédigé en 1279 par Grégoire Aboulfarag, dit Bar Hebraeus*, 2 vols., Bibliothèque de L'école des Hautes Études Sciences Philologiques et Historiques (Paris: É. Bouillon, 1899), 24f.

<sup>247</sup> Takahashi, "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 80-81.

<sup>248</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 60-61, 578\*.

which he was only able to resolve in his reading of the mystics. The sources for this problematic are further explored, in Barhebraeus' engagement with Greek philosophy.

### Barhebraeus' Philosophical Works

Barhebraeus sought to provide the Syrian Christian community with knowledge, especially where he perceived it to be deficient in regards to Islamic achievements. He did not only use materials written in Arabic, but also drew from the Syriac commentaries and translations of Aristotelian philosophy. In returning to Syriac philosophical works that belonged to a much earlier period, he attempted to extend the Syrian interest in Aristotle beyond that of the *Organon*, to the wider curriculum of the Aristotelian sciences. This process becomes clearer when the philosophical endeavours of Barhebraeus are placed within the history of the appropriation of the Neoplatonic Alexandrian tradition of Aristotle into Syriac.

Takahashi has categorised the history of the Syriac tradition of Aristotle into three main periods. The first is the 'purely Syriac' period, beginning with the earliest translations in the sixth century, extending to the revised translations in the latter part of the seventh century. The second main period is the 'Abbāsid translation movement, when Greek scientific works were translated into Arabic (often via Syriac intermediaries) at the *Beit al-Hikma*; the greatest exponent being the East Syrian scholar Ḥunayn ibn Isḥaq (809-873CE).<sup>249</sup> Despite the prodigious translation activities in the 'Abbāsid period, very little material survives. The third and final period is the so-called 'Syriac Renaissance' period, in which the authors may well have had access to the Syriac materials produced with the translation movement in the 'Abbāsid period.<sup>250</sup> The principle representatives of this final period include

---

<sup>249</sup> For the development of Graeco-Arabic translation techniques by such as Ḥunayn ibn Isḥaq under the patronage of the 'Abbāsid Caliphs: Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture : The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th c.)* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 136-41.

<sup>250</sup> Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 111.

Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī (d. 1171CE), who wrote ‘an extensive commentary’ on the *Organon* that survives in an unpublished manuscript,<sup>251</sup> and of course, Barhebraeus.<sup>252</sup>

If Barhebraeus’ organising principles can be said to be foundationally philosophical, that is Aristotelian, then these may be understood better by attending to his works devoted to specifically Aristotelian subjects. Takahashi has listed eight philosophical works, from amongst Barhebraeus’ total literary oeuvre that number more than forty main works.<sup>253</sup> These include:<sup>254</sup>

- *Book of the Pupils of the Eye (Ktābā d-bābātā)*<sup>255</sup>
- *Conversation of Wisdom (Swād sōpiya)*<sup>256</sup>
- *Treatise of Treatises (Têgrat tēgrātā)*: unpublished
- *Cream of Wisdom (Hêwat Hekmtā)*
- *Concise Treatise on the Human Soul - Maqāla mukhtaṣara fī al-naḥs al-bashariya*
- *Treatise on the Science of the Human Soul - Mukhtaṣar fī ‘ilm al-naḥs al-insāniya*<sup>257</sup>
- Translation of Ibn Sīnā’s *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt (Book of Remarks and Admonitions)* - *Ktābā d-remzē wa-m’irānwātā d-Abū ‘Alī bar Sīnā*: unpublished
- Translation of Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī’s (d. 1264) *Zubdat al-Asrār (Essence of Secrets)* – *K. d-zubdat al-asrār*<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, "Syriac Commentary Tradition," in *From Ephrem to Romanos : Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA: Ashgate, 1999), 13-14. Brock notes two unpublished commentaries of Dionysius Bar Ṣalībī devoted to *De interpretatione* and *Prior Analytics*: MS Cambridge, University Library, Gg.2.14.

<sup>252</sup> Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 112-13.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>254</sup> The transliteration of the titles follows the Appendices (1 & 2), rather than Takahashi’s 1999 article.

<sup>255</sup> Janssens has published the Syriac text over two journal articles. Herman F. Janssens, "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye (Concluded)," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 47, no. 2 (1931). "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye (Continued)," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 48, no. 4 (1932).

<sup>256</sup> The full Syriac text is published by Janssens with French translation and commentary. *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*.

<sup>257</sup> These Arabic works are both treatises on the soul, since they have not been translated into English an attempt has been made here to differentiate their titles in translation.

<sup>258</sup> The Arabic original of this work survives, but not Barhebraeus’ Syriac translation. Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of

Of the first four works listed above, the first is concerned only with logic (the short treatise called the *Book of the Pupils of the Eye*), while the others are more comprehensive philosophical compendia of Aristotle.<sup>259</sup> These other treatises, *Swād sōpiya*, *Têgrat têgrātā*, and *Hêwat Hekmtā*, cover the three areas of logic, natural philosophy and metaphysics. Teule states that the intention behind these works was to provide 'textbooks for a progressive course in philosophy', with their alliterating titles indicating that Barhebraeus saw them as 'forming a kind of trilogy despite the variance in the dates at which they were composed'.<sup>260</sup> The longest and most comprehensive of these three works, the *Cream of Wisdom* (composed 1285-6CE) includes twenty-two books and has an additional fourth part on practical philosophy.<sup>261</sup> A number of these books have been published as part of the 'Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus' project, but the third part on metaphysics and comprising two books, has to date not been published.<sup>262</sup> The *Cream of Wisdom* is Barhebraeus' most comprehensive philosophical work, and covers the entire system of Aristotle, drawing heavily on Avicenna or Ibn Sīnā (c.980-1037CE).

Both Takahashi and Brock have surmised that Barhebraeus' corpus of philosophical texts, were designed for the systematised training of students in Aristotelian philosophy. Takahashi argues that Barhebraeus' trilogy of philosophical compendia, were intended to provide a progressive course of philosophical training.<sup>263</sup> Brock develops this point further, with reference to the Syrian emphasis on the importance of logic and the books of the *Organon*. He maintains that these 'highly schematized works' would have provided

---

Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 133 n. 10. cf. *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 70.

<sup>259</sup> "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 114.

<sup>260</sup> "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 252.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-3.

<sup>262</sup> "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 114-15. Takahashi has published an article dealing with the contents of these books, but it is in Japanese and thus inaccessible for this study. See "The Reception of *Kitāb al-Shifā'* in Syriac: An Overview of the Books on Metaphysics in Barhebraeus' *Cream of Wisdom*", in H. Kobayashi et al.(ed.), *Structure and Transformation of Knowledge in Islam: Thought, Science, Society and Their Interactions*, Joint Usage/Research Center for Islamic Area Studies, Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University, 2011, 113-133 (in Japanese).

<sup>263</sup> "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 252.

‘introductions and summaries covering the complete *Organon* on several different levels’.<sup>264</sup> Thus, the *Ktābā d-bābātā* was ‘designed as an elementary introduction’, the *Swād sōpiya* and the *Têgrat tēgrātā* ‘serving as intermediary handbooks’ and the *Hêwat Hekmtā* ‘designed as an advanced compendium’.<sup>265</sup> In this way, Barhebraeus not only reinvigorated the traditional training in the *Organon* in the monastic school-system by producing textbooks of ascending complexity, but at the same time widened the philosophical curriculum, so that logic was read alongside the other books of natural philosophy and metaphysics, thereby restoring the role of logic to its proper place as the ‘tool’ of these sciences.

#### The Problem with the Aristotelian *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*

In the composition of his philosophical works, it has been well documented that Barhebraeus made substantial use of the Arabic Aristotelian tradition. However, he also retrieved many of the older Syriac materials on Aristotle, particularly on natural philosophy and metaphysics. Thus, he made use of the Syriac translation of Nicolaus Damascenus’ *Compendium of Aristotelian Philosophy*, which summarised the physical treatises. Barhebraeus mentions this philosopher in his Arabic *History of the Dynasties* and that he was in the possession of a Syriac copy of the Damascene’s Aristotelian compendium, which was a translation made by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq.<sup>266</sup> Moreover, the Syriac compendium of Nicolaus Damascenus would have possessed particular interest for Barhebraeus, in his endeavour to summarise the whole of the Aristotelian sciences in Syriac.<sup>267</sup> Drossart Lulofs has pointed out that for several centuries, only the *Organon* had been studied by the Syrians, while the rest of the Aristotelian corpus was ‘almost unknown’.<sup>268</sup> He comments

<sup>264</sup> Brock, "Syriac Commentary Tradition," 6.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Drossart Lulofs, *On the Philosophy of Aristotle*, 10. Lulofs lists the following entry from Barhebraeus’ *Mukhtaṣar tā’riḫ al-duwal*, in his *Testimonia* (5.6): ‘Amongst the learned men who lived near this time (the age of Julian the Apostate) was Nicolaus who was preeminent in the study of philosophy. His works comprise (a) a *Compendium of Aristotelian Philosophy*, of which we have a Syriac copy, the translator being Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq, (b) a tract *On plants*, and (c) a *Refutation of those who claim the intellect to be identical with the intelligibles*. According to Ibn Buṭlān he came originally from Laodicea’.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 36. Drossart Lulofs notes with regret that there is no information in the Syriac copy of the *Compendium* as to when and where it was translated. According to Lulofs, Barhebraeus’ information that his copy was translated by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq does not match with the ‘perfectionist’ style of this translator and the ‘rather superficial translation’ which is extant; the attribution seems to have been made at a later date.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 7.

further that for the Syrians Aristotle was ‘the logician’, and so ‘in the library of many a monastery the physical, metaphysical, rhetorical, political and ethical writings were completely lacking’.<sup>269</sup>

The Syriac versions of Nicolaus Damascenus’ compendium on the other hand, included both summary and commentary on the Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, which Barhebraeus incorporated into the composition of two of his major works on theology and philosophy, in the hexaemeral section of the *Candelabrum* and in the *Cream of Wisdom*.<sup>270</sup> Takahashi has drawn attention to the importance of Lulofs’ discovery that Barhebraeus had used the Syriac versions of both Nicolaus Damascenus’ *De plantis* and *On the Philosophy of Aristotle* in the composition of works on Aristotelian natural philosophy.<sup>271</sup> He also drew on Sergius’ translation of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo* in those sections of his works dealing with natural science and Aristotle’s *Metereologica*, in both the *Cream of Wisdom* and the theological compendium, the *Candelabrum*.<sup>272</sup> Moreover, Barhebraeus’ predecessor Bar Šakko had also made use of this Syriac translation of *De mundo*, in his own compendium of Aristotelian philosophy, the *Book of Dialogues*.<sup>273</sup>

Precisely why Barhebraeus was so concerned to broaden the monastic curriculum from the concentrated study of the logic in the early books of the *Organon* remains to be considered. Perhaps he considered that this narrow scope was detrimental to the development of Syrian philosophical thinking, but on the other hand he warned of the inherent dangers of monks reading certain books of Aristotle, particularly the books of the *Physics* and

---

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>270</sup> See also E. L. J. Poortman and H. J. Drossaart Lulofs, *Nicolaus Damascenus De Plantis : Five Translations*, Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van Wetenschappen Afd Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks (Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1989), 68-113.

<sup>271</sup> Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 116.

<sup>272</sup> "Between Greek and Arabic: The Sciences in Syriac from Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus," in *Transmission of Sciences : Greek, Syriac, Arabic and Latin*, ed. Haruo Kobayashi and Mizue Kato (Tokyo: Joint Usage/Research Center for Islamic Area Studies, Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University (WIAS), 2010), 25.

<sup>273</sup> "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 112. Takahashi mentions that in the *Book of Dialogues*, ‘his major work on the secular sciences’, Bar Šakko drew on some Syriac sources of Aristotle, such as Sergius’ translation of the pseudonymous work, *De mundo*.

*Metaphysics*, proclaiming that only limited use should be made of them. To endorse his point, Barhebraeus provides in the *Book of Directions* (*Ktābā d-Huddāyē*), commonly known as the *Nomocanon*, a list of books as a curriculum of study for the ecclesiastical schools.<sup>274</sup>

Out of the disciplines of the outsiders, the book of Anthony of Tagrit, the logical [books] of Aristotle – *Categoriae*, *Peri hermeneias*, *Analytica*, *Apodeictica*, *Topica* [in] eight treatises, *Refutation of the Sophists*, *On the Poets*, and *On Rhetoric* [in] three treatises – and the four mathematical [books/disciplines] provide beauty for the tongue and training for the mind. From the *Physical Hearing* and *After-the-Physics*, one is to take only as much as we have taken in our book the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* and the smaller [Book] of *Rays* for refutation and disputation against those who knew God but did not glorify Him as God.<sup>275</sup>

The reference to the work of the ninth-century West Syrian Anthony of Tagrit would have been his book of rhetoric, the books of Aristotle's logic listed here comprise the entirety of the *Organon*, and the four mathematical books were those of the quadrivium, i.e. arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.<sup>276</sup> The usage of the Aristotelian book of the *Physics* ('Physical Hearing' reflects the actual wording of the Aristotelian title)<sup>277</sup> and the *Metaphysics* ('After-the-Physics' is a more literal translation of the Syriac *bātar kyānāyātā*) is confined to refutation and disputation, with the specific qualification of against whom the works were to be employed. Takahashi has demonstrated that the reference to those 'who knew God but did not glorify Him as God', belongs to Paul's *Letter to the Romans* 1:21, which along with Barhebraeus' subsequent references to Paul (in the following part of the passage not quoted here), has been taken from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Socrates of Constantinople, also known as Socrates Scholasticus (b. 380 CE).<sup>278</sup> Therefore, the need for refutation and disputation would seem to refer to those teachings of the Greek philosophers that conflicted with Christian doctrines, rather than a contemporary context of inter-confessional or inter-religious disputation. In the Preface to the Second Foundation of the *Candelabrum*, Barhebraeus gives an outline of the opinions of the ancient

<sup>274</sup> "Between Greek and Arabic: The Sciences in Syriac from Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus," 29.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 28. Takahashi's translation is made from an extensive passage in Bedjan's Syriac edition. Paul Bedjan, *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei* (Parisii ; Lipsiae: Harrassowitz, 1898), 106.3-07.1.

<sup>276</sup> Takahashi, "Between Greek and Arabic: The Sciences in Syriac from Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus," 29.

<sup>277</sup> "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 69 n. 77.

<sup>278</sup> "Between Greek and Arabic: The Sciences in Syriac from Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus," 30.

philosophers on the nature of the universe, and then concludes that all of their doctrines must be refuted as 'heresies'.<sup>279</sup>

The specifications given in the *Book of Directions* indicate that Barhebraeus perceived a need to protect theological discourse from the abstraction of the natural sciences. Thus, he explicitly argued against the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world in the *Candelabrum*.<sup>280</sup> However, as Takahashi has pointed out, Barhebraeus reaffirms the Aristotelian teaching on the eternity of the world without offering a corrective, in both the *Cream of Wisdom* and the *Conversation of Wisdom*.<sup>281</sup> Giuseppe Furlani has maintained that the philosophical and theological works were written for different audiences, but Takahashi argues that the question remains to be resolved 'as to what views Barhebraeus himself held on such matters and on philosophy in general'.<sup>282</sup> Janssens' suggestion that these inconsistencies indicate Barhebraeus' own uncertainties, which are reflected in his biographical account of a spiritual crisis in the *Dove*, does not resolve the issue, since as Takahashi has pointed out, the composition of the *Dove* predates the *Cream*.<sup>283</sup> Therefore, it remains a pertinent question, why Barhebraeus should provide so many compendia including the more problematic books of Aristotle, without attempting to reconcile the Aristotelian doctrines that ran counter to the theology of his church.

#### Neoplatonic and Aristotelian Cosmology

With the reception of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic cosmology, the Syrians similarly drew on the syntheses formulated by the Christian philosophers of Late Antiquity who had attempted to reconcile the doctrinal conflicts concerning creationism. The 'pagan' Neoplatonists had been subject to substantial critique by the fifth and sixth century Christian Neoplatonists, associated with the school of Alexandria. These figures included

---

<sup>279</sup> Richard J. H. Gottheil, "A Synopsis of Greek Philosophy by Bar Hebraeus," *Hebraica* 3.4 (1887): 252, 54. For further discussion of this conflict, see the later section on Cosmology.

<sup>280</sup> Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 272. See also Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 9f.

<sup>281</sup> Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 272. For the *Cream of Wisdom*, see book V *Meteorologica* 1.3 and 3.1-2.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid. Takahashi quotes: Giuseppe Furlani, "Di Tre Scritti in Lingua Siriaca Di Barhebreo Sull' Anima," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 14 (1934): 307.

<sup>283</sup> Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 252.



Aeneas of Gaza (d. c. 518CE), Zacharias Scholasticus (c. 465 - post 536CE), and John Philoponus (490-570CE), the latter proving particularly influential in the reception of Greek cosmology.<sup>284</sup> Sebastian Brock, commenting on the Christian Neoplatonist circles of sixth century Syria and Palestine, writes that

there was a continuity of interest in the writings of Christian Neoplatonists, such as John Philoponus, and in certain Christian neoplatonizing texts of the sixth century, notably the Dionysian Corpus and writings of Evagrius, right through to the ninth century.

He points out that this continuity of interest in Greek learning was maintained through the seventh century in Syria and Palestine (but not Constantinople), and as late as the ninth century the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Theodosius wrote his Commentary on the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*.<sup>285</sup> Indeed it can be seen that there were direct connections between Barhebraeus and these Christian Neoplatonist circles from the sixth to the ninth centuries, since he was at least familiar with the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius, Evagrius Ponticus (346-399CE), the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* and the Commentary by Theodosius, if not directly with the work of John Philoponus.<sup>286</sup> Furthermore Brock states that these sixth century writers all seem to have had some connection with the controversy over 'Origenism',<sup>287</sup> and thus it would not be surprising for Barhebraeus' mystical texts to reflect the response of these Christian Neoplatonists to the Origenist controversy, particularly in regards to Origen's cosmology. In light of this, Sergius of Resh'aina (d. 536) is an important addition to the list of sixth century Neoplatonic writers supplied by Brock, for Sergius was educated in Alexandria and apparently by his association with the Evagrian corpus, was later accused of Origenism.<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>284</sup> Daniel King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," *Le Muséon* 123, no. 1 (2010): 173-78. For the Platonic philosophical background to the Christian apologists of the Gazan and Alexandrian schools: Sarah Klitenic Wear, "Another Link in the Golden Chain: Aeneas of Gaza and Zacharias Scholasticus on Plotinus *Enn.* 4.3," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 145-53.

<sup>285</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, "A Syriac Intermediary for the Arabic Theology of Aristotle? In Search of a Chimera?," in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona Costa (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 305-6.

<sup>286</sup> John Philoponus was known to Barhebraeus as a philosopher, and is included in the *Chronicon Syriacum*, where it is mentioned that he flourished in Alexandria. Budge, *The Chronography*, 76.

<sup>287</sup> Brock, "A Syriac Intermediary for the Arabic Theology of Aristotle? In Search of a Chimera?," 305.

<sup>288</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," 172-73.

John Philoponus produced many commentaries on Aristotle including the books of logic and the *Physics*, as well as Refutations of Proclus and Aristotle on the eternity of the world, in order to defend the Christian doctrine of creation.<sup>289</sup> Sergius of Resh'aina also made use of John Philoponus's philosophical demonstration against the eternity of the world, in his modification of the cosmological treatise of Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>290</sup> Barhebraeus' Preface to the Second Foundation of the *Candelabrum*, 'On the Nature of the Universe', upholds the 'generation' over the eternity of the world, in direct opposition to the 'heresy' held by all of the 'pagan philosophers'.<sup>291</sup> In the Sentences of the *Dove*, Barhebraeus affirms that the knowledge of the mind is true when it affirms 'that God is one, and necessarily being and the eternal creator'.<sup>292</sup> In these two assertions, Barhebraeus is entering into the debate over the eternity of the world, the outlines of which had been established in the Alexandrian schools of Late Antiquity between the Christian and pagan Neoplatonic philosophers.

While accepting the association of the Christian God with the Prime Mover of all, as the first principle of movement in the book of *Physics*, the subsequent principle of the eternal movement of the heavenly bodies by the Prime Mover and through which the sub-lunar or natural bodies came to be moved, presented an immediate problem to the Christian Neoplatonists. If the eternal movement of the celestial bodies was accepted then the cosmos became eternal, which conflicted with the Christian understanding of the divine creative act, separating the infinite God from the finite creation. In order to maintain the Aristotelian principle of God as both the First Mover and First Cause of existence, there had to be a distinction between the creative activity of God, which was eternal, and what He created, which was not. This was a line of thinking proposed by the later Neoplatonists, and thus a Christian philosopher like Sergius operating within this Neoplatonic milieu, could co-opt such arguments in order to align Aristotle with Christian doctrine. In this way, King

---

<sup>289</sup> King notes that Philoponus' *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World* was published in 529, seven years before the death of Sergius of Resh'aina. Ibid., 177.

<sup>290</sup> "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 70, n. 43.

<sup>291</sup> Gottheil, "A Synopsis of Greek Philosophy by Bar Hebraeus," 254. Gottheil's article includes the Syriac text and English translation of the *Preface* to the Second Base.

<sup>292</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 88, 77, 595\*.

has suggested that Sergius was specifically concerned with building a Christian cosmology on the foundations of the Peripatetic tradition of Aristotle.<sup>293</sup>

An Aristotelian such as Sergius of Resh'aina recognised that one could not begin and end with Aristotle and the Peripatetics, especially when it came to metaphysics and theology. These areas had therefore to be supplemented by the Christian Neoplatonic tradition. This is evident in his translation of the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200CE), whose treatise attempts to harmonise passages from the *Physics*, *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, concerning the cause of the motion of the heavenly spheres with that of the sublunary bodies.<sup>294</sup> Sergius concludes the treatise with his own addition to the commentary, that to gain the highest knowledge of God, the mind must go beyond ordinary perception, and this higher state of knowledge Sergius describes using the Neoplatonic notion of 'contemplation' or *theōria*, for 'the head of all knowledge is *theoria* of Him'.<sup>295</sup> King has proposed that this language clearly comes from Evagrius and that the importance of *theōria* here is 'a sign of the Christian vision of the ascetical life leading towards the contemplation of the supranatural'.<sup>296</sup> However, it also served the purpose of allowing Sergius to modify the problematic aspects of the Aristotelian cosmology as they appeared in Alexander of Aphrodisias' text, according to the Neoplatonic cosmology of Evagrius. King argues that when Alexander came to the eternity of movement in the sublunar regions, that Sergius replaced this conclusion with the contemplation of the fixed outer sphere of the cosmos, while 'at the same time looking back at our world and thereby gaining a profounder understanding of the radical distinction between creature and creator'.<sup>297</sup> This adaptation would seem to have been inspired by the earlier stage of contemplation in the *theōria physikē* of Evagrius, whose goal is described by Becker, as that of grasping 'the

---

<sup>293</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," 178.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 185. King also suggests that Sergius was the likely translator of the complete Evagrian corpus into Syriac. The argument for Sergius' authorship of this corpus is made by Guillaumont. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et L'histoire de L'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962), 215-27.

<sup>297</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," 184.

underlying principles or *lógoi* of visible creation' through the contemplation of both scripture and the physical universe.<sup>298</sup>

#### Eternity of the Cosmos and the Doctrine of Creation

Alongside this Evagrian adaptation, Sergius also sought to meet the challenge of Alexander of Aphrodisias' demonstration of the eternal movement of the sublunar bodies, and thereby the eternity of the world. As King has written, this argument clearly presented a problem for Sergius, 'for whom the world had a clear beginning in the activity of the creator'. Sergius affirmed Alexander's argument that the First Mover must be the cause of eternal motion, and then in an added gloss equated this First Mover, or the First Cause, with the Creator. The act of moving and creating are thus equated by Sergius, who also added that since the Creator is Himself a Being, there must have been an eternity of being.<sup>299</sup> At the end of the treatise, King states that Sergius' approach was that 'God must always have been creating but does not explicitly draw from this the implication that the creation itself is eternal', the latter being the conclusion of Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>300</sup> Sergius' views are located by King within that of the later Neoplatonists who interpreted Aristotle as teaching that the universe was created but that this creation did not have a beginning in time. Therefore, Sergius could argue for God's creative activity being eternal, without coming to the conclusion that the universe was thereby coeternal with God.<sup>301</sup>

In the Sentences of the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus makes implicit reference to the arguments which were presented by Sergius of Resh'aina, in accordance with the Christian dogma of creation. For Barhebraeus, the first essence, as the essential cause of creation, continually renews the essences of all creatures. For, while God works in all beings, the essence of beings is dependent on the First Cause, who is not subject to causality. Barhebraeus argues that if God's essence were not derived from himself, 'but from his

---

<sup>298</sup> Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Divinations : Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 177.

<sup>299</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," 169.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

cause', then he could not be the cause of the essence of another, and thus could not fulfil the creative potential of the First Cause of creation. He concludes therefore, that since this is the case, 'So God alone is the cause of all and He worketh all in all'.<sup>302</sup> However, the divine creative activity being eternal, must continually be generating and annihilating the essences, but this is not something that can be appreciated by the philosophers. Indeed, Barhebraeus states that it is only the Initiated who are able to perceive this activity through their spiritual sight:

It is one God, which works all in all. And in Him we live, and move, and have our being. In Him and through Him are all standing still and motion, all life of mind and soul and that of all beings.<sup>303</sup>

Barhebraeus presents this statement in Sentence 49 as the utterance of the spiritual insight of the Initiated. At the same time, this passage represents a number of principles from Peripatetic philosophy also brought together by Sergius: a God who is single and not composite, the First or Prime Mover from whom all movement is generated, and the highest being who maintains the universe in its being. Barhebraeus maintained the notion of the participation of the natural bodies ('all beings') in God as the single source of all life, movement and being, but not of God as the Aristotelian principle of the Prime Mover of all that is moved in the *Physics*. The Initiated thus reaffirm these principles, not through philosophical study, but by 'glorious revelations', they are able to see clearly that 'at every moment the creator is creating a new essence for all creatures'.<sup>304</sup> Indeed, Barhebraeus contrasts their understanding (or rather, an understanding that is a manner of seeing), with the difficulty of the mind conceiving of the 'annihilation and renovation of the essences'. That the mind is not capable of attaining such insights on its own accord despite all its mental exertions is maintained by Barhebraeus accordingly, 'And after frequent exercise and steady study, it is scarcely able to attain these things, but only dimly.'<sup>305</sup>

---

<sup>302</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 39, 68, 587\*.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., Sentence 49, 70, 588\*.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., Sentence 48, 70, 588\*.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid.

Barhebraeus' conclusions on the eternity of divine creative activity, are thus not given a systematic treatment in the *Dove*, but are to be understood by his comments in the *Sentences*. This would seem to be a deliberate strategy, since the debate over the eternity of movement of the cosmos and the world created in time by an intentional creative act of the divine, is not one that Barhebraeus wished to resolve within the language of scholastic philosophy. However, in entering into the Syrian tradition of adapting Greek cosmology to Christian doctrine, he hints at a Neoplatonic model for the generation of a multiplicity of essences and the eventual return to unification in their source. This discussion of essences is reminiscent of the cosmology of Stephen bar Šūdḥailē, particularly in the First Discourse of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*.<sup>306</sup> Indeed, it could be especially Stephen's cosmology (developed from Evagrius), that attracted such interest by Barhebraeus in the text, and contributed to his insights on the love of God which overcame the ontological problems presented to the Syrians by the Aristotelian *Metaphysics* and *Physics*.

## The Conflict of Thinking in Syrian Hermeneutics

The doctrine of the eternity of the movement of the cosmos appears to have been behind Barhebraeus' warning in the *Book of Directions* against the reading of the *Physics*. And yet, paradoxically, he affirmed the eternity of the cosmos in two of the works forming his trilogy of philosophical compendia. If Barhebraeus did not conceive of the same readership for all of these writings, as Furlani suggests, then Barhebraeus' philosophical works would have been directed specifically to students of philosophy. Therefore, when Barhebraeus outlines the reading curriculum for the monks in the *Book of Directions*, this seems to have been conceived as a parallel system of education. Adam Becker has shown that the texts of the East Syrian monks indicate such a familiarity with the vocabulary of the schoolmen, the

---

<sup>306</sup> Barhebraeus' commentary, *A Book Excerpted from the Book of Excerpts from Hierotheos*, rearranges the content of the *Hierotheos* into twenty-two sections. Section 20 is entitled, 'Of the Universal Essence; and that All came forth thence, and thither all returns; and of Quiet and Rest, and what will become of the Universe'. Fred Shipley Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebræus* (London: Williams and Norgate for the Text and Translation Society, 1927), 178-80, 68\*.

*eskōlāyē*, to the extent that he believes they must themselves had undergone this formal education in the schools of learning.<sup>307</sup> While for the West Syrians, there was not the same division of school and monastery as for the East Syrians, there appears to have been a similar divide between scholastic and ascetic theology. Many of the prominent ecclesiastical leaders amongst the West Syrians clearly had a background in Greek philosophy, which would have involved the study of the *Organon*. This seems to have been the trajectory followed by Barhebraeus.

### The Centrality of Aristotelian logic

Barhebraeus produced texts for the monastic context of scholastic education, but he was also aware of the inherent problematic with the Syriac study of Greek philosophy. This concerned the Aristotelian tradition, but over and above the *Physics* and the *Metaphysics*, it was primarily the *Organon*, the tool of philosophy, which presented the fundamental challenge to theological discourse. By his own account, his position as bishop brought him into the arena of religious disputation with the leaders of other confessions. In the *Ethicon*, he specifically forbade the monks from engaging in disputation. Barhebraeus' instruction of monastic practices makes it clear that he came to view the engagement in religious disputation as running contrary to the meditative focus of the monastic solitary. The conflict between disputation and contemplation did not belong only to the realm of practice, but also had a theoretical underpinning; for Barhebraeus it was a conflict of thinking within the Syrian monastic tradition, and one which was inherited from the Greeks. In the *Dove*, Barhebraeus mediates between the view of Aristotelian logic as central to the Christian way of life, and the complete disparagement of logic by East Syrian ascetics like Dadīšō Qaṭrāyē, for whom the focus on Aristotle's *Organon* in the schools, was but a demonic invention used to distract monks from their monastic practice.<sup>308</sup>

By the seventh century, the study of logic had fully established itself in the West Syrian monastic curriculum with the consequence that logic had come to profoundly determine

---

<sup>307</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 191.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

the ontology of Christian dogma. The emphasis on logic had led to a reaction amongst the East Syrian monastics who felt that the Graeco-Syriac scholastic tradition ran counter to the teachings foundational for the monastic movement. Similar sentiments towards Greek learning also seem to occur in West Syrian monasteries in the seventh century, though without the details of precisely what was the cause of this opposition,<sup>309</sup> it can only be surmised that the nature of such objections were similar to those made by the East Syrian monastics. Indeed, if the study of logic met with serious objections from some quarters, in others, it was understood to be a fundamental component of instruction, since logic was not simply the tool for the study of Greek philosophy, but a system of reasoning essential to all intellectual endeavours including the study of Scripture. George of the Arabs (d. 724CE), for example, saw the Christian path as beginning with the study of logic.<sup>310</sup> The East Syrian scholastic tradition shared this view of the centrality of logic, which allowed for some cross-over of texts and authorities on Aristotle.<sup>311</sup> Patriarch Timothy's recourse to the monastic libraries of the Syrian Orthodox has already been mentioned, although this was in response to the specific request of the Caliph, rather than of his own volition.<sup>312</sup> However, at least one eminent East Syrian figure, Severus Sebokht (c.575-666/7CE), departed for the West Syrian monastery of Qennešre. Severus Sebokht had been a teacher at the East Syrian school of Nisibis until a doctrinal dispute caused him to leave his position in 612. As bishop of Qennešre, he became a leading exponent of the commentary tradition of Aristotle, particularly logic and syllogisms, producing a *Discourse on Syllogisms in Prior Analytics* in 665.<sup>313</sup> He was also the Syriac translator of Paul the Persian's *Exposition of the Logic of Aristotle*, a sixth-century work originally written in Pahlavi by this Aristotelian scholar of

---

<sup>309</sup> The change of heart by the West Syrian monks of Eusabona towards the instruction in Greek learning given by Jacob of Edessa, has been mentioned already.

<sup>310</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 79.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 80. King states in this regard, 'that many of our manuscripts of Syriac philosophical texts are of Eastern origin, that Easterners read the same seventh- and eighth-century translations of Aristotle as did the Westerners'.

<sup>312</sup> Erica C. D. Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbasids," in *Der Christliche Orient Und Seines Umwelt. Gesammelte Studien Zu Ehren Jurgen Tubach*, ed. Sophia G. Vashalomidze and Lutz Greisiger (Wiesbaden Harrassowitz: 2007), 291.

<sup>313</sup> John M McMahon, "Severus Sebokht [Sebokht, Sebukht, Seboht]," in *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, ed. Thomas Hockey, et al. (Springer New York, 2007), 1044-45. McMahon emphasises the importance of Severus in transmitting the Greek astronomical knowledge to Syrian scholars.



the Church of the East.<sup>314</sup> King refers to the 'ecumenical' side of Syriac logical studies, and that conversely, the West Syrian texts such as those of Sergius of Resh'aina and Jacob of Edessa, were accepted as teaching materials in the East Syrian schools of learning.<sup>315</sup>

This aspect to the Syriac study of logic can similarly be seen in the texts of Barhebraeus, whose short introductory treatise on logic alludes directly to Paul the Persian's *Exposition of the Logic of Aristotle*, through the very wording of his title - *The Book of the Pupils of the Eye*. In Paul the Persian's introduction to his treatise on logic, the faculty of logical thinking is likened to the eye of the soul which is enlightened by wisdom, rather than the merely visual perception of material things. Thus he states that 'It is, indeed, the only true eye that sees everything, because of its affinity with the truth that is in everything'.<sup>316</sup> Therefore it would seem to be this understanding of logic which is as fundamental to the mind as the 'pupil' is to the eye that Barhebraeus refers to in the title of his treatise.<sup>317</sup> Alongside his summaries of logic for the study of Aristotelian philosophy, of which the *Book of the Pupils of the Eye* forms a preparatory work, Barhebraeus also includes a summary of logic in the second part of the first base on knowledge in his theological *summa* the *Candelabrum*.<sup>318</sup> However, in the *Dove*, his later work on monastic instruction of the spiritual life, he presents a different view of the study of logic, acknowledging the problematic aspects to the dominance of the *Organon* in the scholastic education of leading ecclesiastical figures.

Syriac religious disputation or *durrāšā* rested in various ways upon Aristotelian principles of logic and dialectic, derived from the *Organon*.<sup>319</sup> This is also evident in the structure of

---

<sup>314</sup> Severus Sebokht is thought to have translated Paul's Introduction to Aristotle's Logic from Middle Persian into Syriac, as listed in Brock's Appendix. Brock, "Syriac Commentary Tradition," 11.

<sup>315</sup> Daniel King, *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories : Text, Translation, and Commentary*, *Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 9-10. King gives the example of an East Syrian Codex of 1260, which includes Sergius' commentary and Jacob's version of the *Categories*, alongside the grammar of an East Syrian Catholicos, Elias of Tirḥan.

<sup>316</sup> Citation from Paul the Persian's text is given in Janssens' introduction: Herman F. Janssens, "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 47, no. 1 (1930): 26.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 26-27. Janssens argues that logic is analogous to the pupil of the eye, just as sight is essential to the sensations, and so the pupil of the eye is 'instrumental to systematic logical thinking'. Further that the Syriac word for 'eye' (*aynā*) is a frequent metaphorical reference for the faculties of the mind.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>319</sup> The same could be said of Arabic religious disputation in Christian-Muslim dialogues dating from the beginning of the 'Abbāsid period in the eighth century. On the significance of Aristotle's *Topics* for inter-religious disputation and especially the dialogue of Patriarch Timothy I with the Caliph al-Mahdī, see Gutas,

Barhebraeus' *Cream of Wisdom*, which contains a section on disputation within the book of *Topics*, the book from Aristotle's *Organon* concerned with 'dialectical deduction'.<sup>320</sup> Teule has suggested that when in the *Ethicon* Barhebraeus warns against the love of *durrāšā*, this refers to those who engaged in the methods of disputation and that the setting would usually be a religious disputation.<sup>321</sup> The *Ethicon* also instructs monks to refrain from engaging in disputations about the 'natures and hypostases' (*kyānē w-qnomē*) of Christ.<sup>322</sup> Barhebraeus further states in his chapter on the Incarnation in the *Candelabrum*, that while the different confessions (*tawdyātā*) may prefer 'various terms *kunnōyē* to express the mystery of the union of Christ's humanity and divinity', none of them represent heretical Christological views.<sup>323</sup> Teule has stated that such an attitude was not unique to Barhebraeus, but was characteristic of the Syrian Renaissance.<sup>324</sup> However, it would appear that Barhebraeus' views on Christology were not simply what Teule describes as an 'ecumenical intuition',<sup>325</sup> but rather an outcome of deep reflection on the presuppositions of those practising *durrāšā*, since the different terms used by the main confessions are only a reflection of the union in Christ of the divine and human, and indeed can do no more than provide a representation of this mystery. Barhebraeus professes in the *Dove* that 'I absolutely forsook disputation with anyone concerning confession', since all Christians possess 'one unvarying equality'.<sup>326</sup>

---

*Greek Thought, Arab Culture : The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th c.)*, 61-69.

<sup>320</sup> N. Peter Joosse, "Bar Hebraeus' *Ktaba Da-Hewath Hekhmtha* (*Butyrum Sapientiae*): A Description of the Extant Manuscripts," *Le Muséon* 112, no. 3-4 (1999): 422-23. (VI) The *Topics*, C.8: 'About the order (or: arrangement) that is suitable in a disputation'.

<sup>321</sup> Herman Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 3 (2003): 33.

<sup>322</sup> Paul Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei* (Parisiis ; Lipsiae: Otto Harrassowitz, 1898), 221. This citation from Bedjan's edition of the Syriac text is given in Teule's article: Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 33.

<sup>323</sup> Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, 230. See also: F. Nau, "Textes monopysites," *Patrologia orientalis* XIII, 2 (1919), pp. 248-269; see esp. p. 264.

<sup>324</sup> Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 34.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>326</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 60, 578\*.

His collection of poems also contain a collection concerning *durrāšā*,<sup>327</sup> in which can be found a poem entitled, 'Question of Ɣamīs bar Qardāḥē and Answers of Daniel bar Ḥaṭṭāb and Barhebraeus on the fact that Our Lord does not fall under the ten [Aristotelian] categories'.<sup>328</sup> This appears to be a discussion in three parts, beginning with the interrogation by the East Syrian Kamīs bar Qardāḥē, followed by the response of Daniel bar Ḥaṭṭāb, and finally another response from Barhebraeus.<sup>329</sup> In considering this discussion in terms of the structure of Aristotle's *Organon*, the subject of the debate revolves around the first book of the *Categories*, concerning the predicates or names (Syr. *kūnnāyē*) and their application to God.<sup>330</sup> The thematic of this poem corresponds to Barhebraeus' attitude to Christology when he states that the different terms used by the confessions do not represent a real difference. When Barhebraeus objects to disputation and its divisive use of terminology (*kūnnāyē*) in the rationalisation of God according to the Aristotelian *Categories*, he is equally making a direct critique of the primacy of logic in religious discourse. For Barhebraeus, the reliance on the definitions of substance, argument through syllogisms, and the rules of dialectical reasoning, is a kind of reasoning which gives rise to a concept of God derived from the epistemology of logic, but not God Himself. Of course, Barhebraeus himself summarised the *Organon* in several treatises, including his final compendium of philosophy, the *Cream of Wisdom*, which customarily begins with a first part on logic (*mlilūtā*). Therefore he clearly continued to recognise the importance of logic and the necessity of the study of Aristotelian philosophy, until the end of his life.

In the aforementioned *Book of Directions*, Barhebraeus aligns the practices of disputation and refutation along with the books of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, all of which belong to

---

<sup>327</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, "The Poems of Barhebraeus: A Preliminary Concordance," *Христианский Восток* NS 6 [12] (2013): 83. Dolabani divides the poems into twelve sections according to topics, of which the eleventh is on disputation.

<sup>328</sup> Augustinus Scebabi, *Gregorii Bar-Hebraei Carmina* (Romae: ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1877), 153-56. Yuhanna Dolabani, *Mušḥātā* (Glane/Losser Holand: Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian, 1983), 157-59, no. 11.2. This English title of the Syriac disputation poem listed in the editions of Scebabi and Dolabani is given by Takahashi. Takahashi, "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus," 252 n. 10.

<sup>329</sup> "The Poems of Barhebraeus: A Preliminary Concordance," 108. Takahashi provides a concordance of all the poems in these collections, and lists this disputation poem (no. 11.2) as having three parts according to their Latin titles: CCLX. *Chamisii Nestoriani interrogation ad Bar-Chettab*. CCLXI. *Danielis Bar-Chettab responsio*. CCLXXII. *Barbrei Maphriani ad utrumque Responsio*.

<sup>330</sup> Watt, "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad," 35.

Aristotelian disciplines. In this manner, Barhebraeus' directives allow for the reading of these more problematic books of Aristotle solely for the purpose of engaging in religious disputation, which would appear to be a necessary pursuit for some members of his Church, but it was a practice not recommended for those devoted to the internal life of the monastery. The epistemological association of the genre of disputation with the Aristotelian disciplines in general, can also be seen in the writings of Barhebraeus' predecessor Dionysius Bar Šalībī, whose works include a polemical book on disputation or *durrāšā*,<sup>331</sup> as well as a series of commentaries including Porphyry's *Isagoge* and the books of the *Organon* up to the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>332</sup>

Barhebraeus certainly revived the Aristotelian sciences within the Syrian cultural milieu, but he also admits in the *Dove* to the state of despair which the study of Greek philosophy had brought him. He declares that it was not until the Lord led him to turn to the writings of 'the Initiated', such as the 'Aba Euagrius and others, occidental and oriental', that he was restored from the despair 'of psychical, if not of bodily life'.<sup>333</sup> The teachings of Evagrius, which Barhebraeus identifies specifically as the source of his salvation, would have been accessible through a number of different avenues, since the translation of Evagrius into Syriac had influenced various streams of thought amongst the Syrians. The Evagrian tradition was influential for early West Syrian translators of Greek texts such as Sergius of Resh'aina, and was similarly in evidence amongst the seventh and eighth century East Syrian monastic writers such as Isaac of Nineveh. Indeed it was the Syrian form of Evagrian monasticism, which was to prove so influential for Barhebraeus in his contribution to mystical thought. The tradition of monastic spirituality provided the solution, proffering to Barhebraeus a means of overcoming the impasse that he had encountered within the Syrian tradition.

---

<sup>331</sup> Teule, "It Is Not Right to Call Ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics: Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusades," 16-17. Teule notes that this work, now lost apart from a few chapters, is recorded by Dionysius' contemporary Michael the Syrian in his *Chronicle*, who provides a biographical entry for his friend; the Syriac text is edited by Chabot. Jean Baptiste Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, 4 vols. (Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1963), XIX.699.

<sup>332</sup> Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 34.

<sup>333</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61, 578\*.

### The West Syrian Monastic Curriculum

Some precedent for the attempt to synthesise the Aristotelian sciences with the spiritual path coming from Neoplatonic thinkers such as Plotinus, is found already amongst the earliest of the Syrian philosophers who provided the first Syriac translations of Aristotle in the fifth and sixth centuries. King and John Watt have emphasised the role of Sergius of Resh'aina (d. 536) in formulating a synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Neoplatonic mysticism into a monastic curriculum of learning for the West Syrians. This curriculum pursued a religious goal in the study of philosophy. Indeed Watt has identified the Syriac transmission of Aristotle as beginning with Sergius of Resh'aina, a student in the school of Ammonius at Alexandria, who produced a Syriac commentary on the *Categories*.<sup>334</sup> He nominates this Sergius' most important treatise, since 'it was the starting point of the embedding of Aristotle's thought, especially his logic, in the intellectual culture of the Near East'.<sup>335</sup> In his commentary, Sergius gives an introduction on the aims of studying all the writings of Aristotelian philosophy, which should begin with the *Categories*, and proceed with the rest of the *Organon*, as a prolegomenon to the Aristotelian sciences as a whole:

the aim of each one of the [logical] treatises, beginning the chain with that On Categories and similarly treating each one of them in the same way... then to go on to his other treatises, those on the parts of practical (philosophy), then physics and mathematics, and finally those called theological.<sup>336</sup>

In this programme, Sergius follows the Alexandrian tradition of philosophy, which proceeded through the Aristotelian sciences from logic to physics, mathematics and metaphysics.<sup>337</sup> The end goal of studying Aristotelian logic and philosophy for Sergius was to reach theology, categorised by King as the 'contemplative theology' of *theōria*.<sup>338</sup> For Sergius though, logic remained essential for the very interpretation of scripture, although

---

<sup>334</sup> The earliest translator of the *Categories* is however not known, though this was attributed to Sergius of Resh'aina until Henri Huggonnard-Roche demonstrated otherwise. Henri Huggonnard-Roche, "Sur les Versions Syriaques des "Catégories" d'Aristote," *Journal Asiatique* 275, no. 3-4.

<sup>335</sup> Watt, "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad," 28.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Watt's translation of Sergius' commentary on the *Categories* is from the British Library manuscript: Add. 14,658, fol. 3rb.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>338</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 62. King states that rather than articulate a particular Christological position, such an approach aspires to 'the ascent of the individual soul towards a higher union with the godhead'.

he acknowledged that there are those for whom logic is unnecessary, and who receive such knowledge directly by illumination and thus have no need of this instrument of discernment:

...without these writings (sc. Aristotle's logical works) neither can the meaning of medical writings be attained, nor can the opinion of the philosophers be understood, nor indeed can the true sense be uncovered of the divine Scriptures, wherein lies our help of salvation – unless it should be that someone receives the divine ability thanks to the exalted nature of his way of life, with the result that he has no need for human instruction. But education and advancement in the direction of all the human sciences, as far as human ability is concerned, cannot take place without the exercise of logic.<sup>339</sup>

In this statement, Sergius makes no hint of a possible conflict between the methods of logic and the divinely-inspired abilities of the monks. They are it seems, attaining the same goal. Through their divinely-inspired ability, the mystics overcome the dependency on logic in the methods of the human sciences. To what extent Barhebraeus was familiar with the philosophical system of Sergius is not clear, but he certainly considered him a West Syrian,<sup>340</sup> and the *Cream of Wisdom* draws on Sergius' translation of the Aristotelian commentary *De mundo*. While Barhebraeus would appear to share Segius' views on the centrality of logic for all the human sciences, in his mystical texts he does hint at a fundamental tension between the methods of logic and the divine gift of revelation.

Alongside the reading of the *Organon* as the instrument of logic, training in the Neoplatonic tradition rested on Pseudo-Dionysius and Evagrius Ponticus. Sergius' appended treatise to his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius, which has become known as the *Mēmṛā on Spiritual Life*, outlines his vision for a Christian philosophical curriculum.<sup>341</sup> King has argued that Sergius of Resh'aina in his treatise on the spiritual life, sought 'to establish parallel courses

---

<sup>339</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, "Monasticism in Iraq : The Cultural Contribution," in *The Christian Heritage of Iraq : Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*, ed. Erica C. D. Hunter, Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 70-71.

<sup>340</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation," 180-81. Daniel King comments that a certain ambiguity in Sergius' position led to 'both West and East Syrians of a later age claiming him as one of their own', and thus Barhebraeus claims him as a follower of Severan Miaphysite theology while 'Abdīshō' of Nisibis includes Sergius amongst the East Syrian writers.

<sup>341</sup> The Syriac text of the *Mēmṛā* has been edited and translated into French by Dom. Polycarpe Sherwood, and published over two volumes by the journal *L'Orient syrien*. P. Sherwood, "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la Vie Spirituelle," *L'Orient syrien* 5, 6.(1960): 433-457; (1961): 95-115, 121-156.

of spiritual education which complemented one another', combining the Alexandrian system of the Greek sciences beginning with Aristotle and the books of logic, with the Neoplatonic systems of Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius which dealt with the levels of mystical experience.<sup>342</sup> He states that in the model propounded by Sergius, Evagrius and Pseudo-Dionysius displaced the reading of Plato in the Alexandrian curriculum, and that it was through these writings that the subject of metaphysics and theology were to be reached.<sup>343</sup> Therefore, it would seem that Aristotelian metaphysics was not considered sufficient to this end goal of theology, and that the Syrian-Dionysian tradition was required to supplement the Aristotelian sciences. King comments that the 'serious' study of Aristotle in Syriac seems to have been conducted mostly by those who were also followers of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>344</sup> There appears therefore to be a close association of the reading of Aristotle and of Pseudo-Dionysius in Syriac, the latter providing a development of the connection between metaphysics and theology that is implicit in Aristotle's metaphysics, but given its definitive Christian Neoplatonic form by Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Hierarchies* and *Mystical Theology*.

#### The Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Qennešre

Barhebraeus' literary output demonstrates his study of both Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius, the former for his philosophical compendia and the latter for his mystical texts. Thus it would seem that Barhebraeus followed a line of thinking in the Syrian Orthodox tradition, in which the reading of both Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius were complementary aspects to a systematised curriculum of study in the monasteries, which likely followed in outline that which was envisioned by Sergius of Resh'aina.<sup>345</sup> Watt has mooted the reading of both Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle at the monastery of Qennešre, a centre of Greek learning for the Syrian Orthodox.<sup>346</sup> At Qennešre, Athanasius of Balad

---

<sup>342</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 79.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Watt's article develops the association of Aristotle with Pseudo-Dionysius in tenth-century Baghdad. John W. Watt, "From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in Syriac Tradition " in *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity : The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, ed. Josef Lössl and J. W. Watt (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>346</sup> "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad," 38.

translated Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and *Topics*, alongside the works of both Gregory of Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>347</sup> However, the integration of the study of Pseudo-Dionysius with Aristotle in the sixth and seventh centuries by the West Syrian scholastics does not seem to have recognised the difference of epistemology existing between Aristotelian logic and Pseudo-Dionysian mystical theology.

The Syrian Orthodox monastery of Qennešre was well known in its day both as a centre of Greek learning and even more, for its ascetical training.<sup>348</sup> Both King and Jack Tannous have emphasised the importance of the monastery of Qennešre, but while the former considers it to have been a centre primarily of ascetic training, the latter has stressed that this monastery was famous for its teaching of Greek and was 'a training ground for almost all of the major Syrian Orthodox bishop-scholars of the seventh and eighth centuries'.<sup>349</sup> Tannous has provided a list of the well-known seventh and early eighth century figures thought to have studied there, which includes: Thomas of Harkel (d. 627CE), Paul of Edessa (d. 526CE), Severus Sebokht, Athanasius of Balad, Jacob of Edessa (d. 708CE), and George, Bishop of the Arabs.<sup>350</sup> Brock, commenting on this list, notes that 'the last four wrote extensively on secular topics, particularly philosophy'.<sup>351</sup> Indeed, Barhebraeus states in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* that many of the Syrian Orthodox patriarchs learned Greek during their time at Qennešre. Thus, prior to becoming patriarch, Julian (d. 708CE) trained there 'in the Attic tongue'.<sup>352</sup> Tannous' argument is that, from around the seventh century, there was already a 'Miaphysite curriculum of study' at the monastery of Qennešre, that is

---

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>348</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 77, n. 68. 'We should not be fooled into thinking of Jacob and his fellows as ivory-tower philosophers. Qenneshre was better known in its day as a centre of ascetical training and achievement than philosophy.'

<sup>349</sup> Jack Tannous, "You Are What You Read: Qenneshre and the Miaphysite Church in the Seventh Century," in *History and Identity in the Late Antique near East*, ed. Philip Wood, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94-5.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid. Tannous gives the following references for Barhebraeus' entries on these figures in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, I:267, 75, 87, 90.

<sup>351</sup> Brock, "A Syriac Intermediary for the Arabic Theology of Aristotle? In Search of a Chimera?," 299.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, I:295-96.



reflected in Barhebraeus' list of books in the *Book of Directions*, that are to be read in the church.<sup>353</sup>

Alongside the passage of the *Book of Directions* in which Barhebraeus outlines the books of the 'outsiders' to be read in the monastic schools of the Syrian Orthodox, there is also a list of works by Christian authorities. These include the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory Nazianzus, Severus of Antioch, Ephrem the Syrian, Jacob of Serugh, Isaac of Antioch, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodotus. Also proscribed are the *Paradise of the Fathers* by Palladius, the *Hexameron* of Basil, texts from Jacob of Edessa, and the commentaries of Moše bar Kepha and Dionysius Bar Šalībī.<sup>354</sup> Tannous has argued that the canon of authorities potentially established at Qennešre, was part of the effort to sharpen the intellectual identity of 'the Syriac-speaking Miaphysite movement', for the training of the church leadership in a 'graduate-school syllabus'.<sup>355</sup> Only those who had graduated through such a syllabus into leadership would have been in a position to appreciate the epistemological conflict that underpinned the curriculum in the West Syrian monasteries.

Paradoxically, the canon of writings presented in Barhebraeus' list represent rival epistemological frameworks, epitomised by the logic of Aristotle and the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. Even if the works of the 'outsiders' and the 'insiders' were studied together in the same institution at a monastery like Qennešre, there would have remained an epistemological tension similar to that which existed in the Church of the East. Students in the Miaphysite Syrian schools may have specialised more in one set of authors than the other. It is possible that only a minority graduated onto the reading of the philosophical curriculum, in an inversion of the practice that occurred in the Church of the East. The possibility remains that there was a standard way of integrating these authors in the monastic schools. Watt has contended that the integrated curriculum envisaged by Sergius of Resh'aina was conceived for the monastic school, and while it is not known how many such schools followed this model, he suggests the monastery of Qennešre as a likely

---

<sup>353</sup> Tannous, "You Are What You Read: Qenneshre and the Miaphysite Church in the Seventh Century," 100.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 101.

candidate.<sup>356</sup> There clearly was a strong tradition of Graeco-Syriac Aristotelianism at Qennešre, especially focussing on the reading of the complete *Organon*.<sup>357</sup> That a canon of authorities was read in the West Syrian monasteries is clear, and it would be worthwhile to explore further to what extent the harmonisation of these authorities succeeded. While Barhebraeus makes a similar attempt to Sergius in integrating Aristotelian logic with theological works of the Greek Fathers and the mystics, his *Book of Directions* is less a harmonisation than a list of authorities. Indeed Barhebraeus' particular appreciation of the thinking of Evagrius appears to have occurred well after the composition of the *Book of Directions*, according to the account of the *Book of the Dove*.<sup>358</sup>

#### The East Syrian Scholastic Tradition: the School versus the Monastery

In the East Syrian tradition, philosophical reasoning was conducted via group study in the schools like the famous School of Nisibis, while the monks conducted their private devotions in their monastic cells. The seventh century monastic movement in the Church of the East, came to deploy a disparaging rhetoric against the schools of learning for their focus on the application of logic to the study of scripture. However, Becker demonstrates that the East Syrian monasteries and the schools were not entirely independent of each other, but rather that students might graduate from the school to the monastery, according to their ability.<sup>359</sup> He shows that the very language of criticism employed by the monks often portrays a prior philosophical training acquired in the schools.<sup>360</sup> The critique coming from the monks opposed the approaches of these two institutions somewhat irreconcilably, in that the scholastic focus on logic was not simply a lower path of instruction, but actually harmful to the monastic ideal of purification and perfection.<sup>361</sup> The faculty of reason had

---

<sup>356</sup> Watt, "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad," 36.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 36-7. Watt also states that it was at Qennešre that there is the earliest evidence for the translation of the complete *Organon*.

<sup>358</sup> See the Appendix for the chronology of Barhebraeus' works, where it is suggested that the *Book of Directions* comes after 1272CE, while the *Book of the Dove*, after 1279CE.

<sup>359</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 196.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 190-1.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. King's evaluation of the difference in attitude here. 'The Eastern ascetics who vilified philosophy did so because they saw it as nothing but a first step towards their higher goals; Sergius, George, and the others probably agreed, but they concluded that one must therefore take that philosophy seriously and on its own terms.' King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 80-81.

still to be trained, not through the *Organon*, but in the noetic intuition of the divine wisdom. Isaac of Nineveh describes the faculty of reason as aspiring towards 'divine contemplation', and this contemplative faculty of the soul 'brings the mind close to complete mingling with God, causing it to peer (*ndīq*) into His divine mysteries which (exist) in a luminous state (*šapyā'īt*) above the world'.<sup>362</sup>

The East Syrian spiritual writings, especially those of the seventh century monks of Bet Qaṭrāyē like Isaac of Nineveh, also provided great inspiration to Barhebraeus. Many of these texts had crossed confessional boundaries, to be read by the West Syrians in their monastic anthologies. The tension that had existed between the East Syrian monks and the schoolmen reflected rival epistemological frameworks that had developed with the reception of Greek learning in Syriac. A similar tendency can be observed in the seventh century monasteries of the Syrian Orthodox, though the hostility appears to be less widespread.<sup>363</sup> There appears to be no such evidence for continued hostilities in the West Syrian monasteries of Barhebraeus' own time. However, the West Syrian curriculum contained in fact the same epistemological conflict, in its incorporation of the Evagrian-inspired Pseudo-Dionysius, alongside Aristotle.

Becker brings out this conflict of epistemology by highlighting the importance of the Evagrian system of thought for the East Syrian monks. In Evagrius' stages of contemplation or *theōria*, the ascetic aspires towards the *theōria* of the Holy Trinity, this is the highest stage which must be conducted in silence, recognising the failure of language and image to express the inaccessible. In Evagrius' *Gnosticus*, there is a rejection of language and of logic

---

<sup>362</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 185. Sebastian P. Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh : (Isaac the Syrian) : 'The Second Part', Chapters IV-XLI*, 2 vols., Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: Peeters, 1995), XIX.5-6.

<sup>363</sup> Brock relates the anecdote of how Jacob of Edessa was invited by the monks of Eusabona to teach there in the latter half of the 680s, in order to renew the study of Greek at the monastery: 'After eleven years however, it appears that the opposition of some of the monks to Greek culture resulted in Jacob leaving for the nearby monastery of Tel 'Ada'. "A Syriac Intermediary for the Arabic Theology of Aristotle? In Search of a Chimera?," 299-300. Brock cites the source of this information as the biographical notice on Jacob of Edessa given by Michael the Syrian in his *Chronicle*. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, XI.14.

as a means of constructing an image of the divine in the human mind.<sup>364</sup> Evagrius states in the *Gnosticus*,

Every proposition has a *genus*, which is predicated, or a difference, or a *species*, or a property, or an accident or what is compounded of these: but nothing which is said in regard to the Holy Trinity is acceptable. Let the ineffable be worshipped in silence.<sup>365</sup>

From the statement that the ineffable should be worshipped in silence, can be understood Evagrius' understanding of prayer as a form of contemplation and his particular emphasis on wordless prayer in the *Chapters on Prayer*, where 'Prayer is a communion of the mind with God' which is 'without intermediary'.<sup>366</sup> Columba Stewart explains that Evagrius' teaching on prayer comes as a result of the fact that 'Evagrius follows Aristotle in seeing the mind as creating an inner world of conceptual depictions relating to the things external to the self'.<sup>367</sup> These conceptual depictions, *noēmata*, form 'the means by which the mind processes information'.<sup>368</sup> It is because of this shared Aristotelian understanding of the mind, that Evagrius asserts the necessity of true prayer to be without word or image, since the contemplation of the Holy Trinity should not involve any proposition that would ground the 'ineffable' in material ontology.

The Evagrian emphasis on wordless prayer influenced the works of Isaac of Nineveh, and 'pure' (šapyā) prayer became an important characteristic of Syrian mysticism.<sup>369</sup> Becker has portrayed Isaac as a representative of 'the Evagrius-inspired monastic ideology' that

---

<sup>364</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 176-77.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 177. This is Becker's English translation of the Greek fragment of the *Gnosticus* 41, which has been edited and translated into French by Antoine and Claire Guillaumont. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique, ou, a Celui Qui est Devenu Digne de la Science*, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 166-67.

<sup>366</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 142. Evagrius, *Chapters of Prayer*, 114.

<sup>367</sup> Columba Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 187. Stewart quotes from Aristotle: 'one cannot think without imagery,' *De memoria* 449b, ll. 35-36.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987), xxviii.

was common to the East Syrian monastic writers in this period.<sup>370</sup> Furthermore, Becker has claimed that the commentary by the East Syrian Church Father Babai the Great (d. 628/30CE) on Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostica* attests to the importance of Evagrian thought in the Church of the East.<sup>371</sup> The higher status of Evagrius for the East Syrians from at least the seventh century onwards, would account for the impact that the corpus had on the monastic writers, as well as the opposition of the monks to the schools. Dadīšō quotes directly from Evagrius in his condemnation of the books of Aristotle, and specifically 'the ones which are for the learning of reason (*yullphānā da-mlīlūtā*), I mean, the *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*, *Apodeiktikos* (i.e. *Posterior Analytics*), and the rest of such as these'.<sup>372</sup> It was reasoning through logic derived from the books of the *Organon* and beginning with the *Categories*, which, in his opinion, formed the particular source of contention.

Barhebraeus shows his awareness of the antipathy of the East Syrian monks when outlining the monastic curriculum of reading in the Church of the East, in which he focuses on the monastic ascetics rather than the teachers in the schools. King has maintained that such a description of the East Syrian curriculum follows 'the rhetoric of the East Syrian commentators and theologians', who were those who clearly 'distanced themselves from what they perceived as the impurities of 'lower', 'secular' learning.'<sup>373</sup> On this basis, Barhebraeus appears to be more in sympathy with the attitude of the East Syrian monastics, despite his interest in the scholastic philosophy of the Alexandrian tradition. In the *Dove*, he contrasts the 'professional knowledge' of the teachers of the scriptures which is learnt, with the Initiated who know through 'seeing', that is they possess the spiritual sight of the perfect.<sup>374</sup> He similarly recognises the difference between the approach of the

---

<sup>370</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 184.

<sup>371</sup> Becker refers to Babai the Great, as 'the dominant intellectual of the Church of the East in the early seventh century and virtual leader of the church during its acephalous period'. Ibid., 178.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 190. The passage is from: Dadīšō Qaṭrāyē's *Commentary on the Book of Abba Isaiah*, 181.13-182.7. Rene Draguet, *Commentaire du Livre d'Abba Isaie (Logoi I-XV)*, vol. 326, CSCO (Louvain: Peeters, 1972), 140.

<sup>373</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 80.

<sup>374</sup> 'Some of the teachers who are sufficiently trained in the holy scriptures and their explanation are not willing to learn the way of the kingdom from the Initiated who are not trained in their professional knowledge. They do not understand that their knowledge, however clever they may be, is one of hearing; that of the Initiated, however crude they may be, one of seeing.' Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 73, 591\*, Sentence 68.

philosophers who attempt to understand God as the necessary being of metaphysics, and that of the ascetic monks who seek the direct illumination of divine knowledge.

In the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus explicitly criticises the method of using syllogisms (from the *Posterior Analytics* of the *Organon*), and asserts the limitations of metaphysical reasoning of the divine being, to insist on language as only a secondary means of representation.<sup>375</sup> This reflects a Neoplatonic attitude to language, that when it comes to the supra-natural, representational language becomes inadequate. The *Dove* reveals an implicit sympathy with a more Neoplatonic position like that of Evagrius, which sees the limitations of language for what transcends the concepts of metaphysics, in that the divine being goes beyond the relatedness of the word and the thing as formalised in logic and applied in metaphysics. Barhebraeus' mystical texts reflect a Neoplatonic emphasis in his Aristotelian principles of investigation, in a manner that would follow the late Alexandrians and particularly Sergius' integration of philosophical systems. However he does recognise a fundamental conflict of approaches, the illumination of the mind by the light of the Spirit, is not simply a short-cut to Aristotelian investigations through training in logic. For Barhebraeus, the divine mystery goes beyond all representational language, only to reveal itself suddenly in the gift of love, which transcends the rules of logic.<sup>376</sup> Through contemplation, or *theōria*, the philosopher may reach the highest knowledge of God, but in the Evagrian system this is only the *theōria physikē*, the height of knowledge of created things. Therefore illumination is not a state of perception that the mind can acquire of its own accord, since the mind is constrained by the images of the material world. Despite what Sergius intimates, philosophical study and ascetic training do not in fact aspire to the same goal; these two paths presuppose different understandings of how God may be conceived which determines 'what' is being conceived of the divine. For God not to be another image constructed by the mind there must be a descent of the divine in the giving of the gift, through the working of the Spirit in the heart. Without this descent into immanence, symbolised by the heart made luminous through the illumination of the Spirit,

---

<sup>375</sup> For example, he criticises using syllogisms to discern the divine essence. Ibid., 78, 596\*, Sentence 90.

<sup>376</sup> Simeon d-Taybūtēh describes spiritual understanding as a gift of illumination: 'The seedling of prayer acquires strength as it becomes illuminated and radiant with spiritual understanding; it is full of peace and joy, burning spontaneously as incense. All this is the gift of God.' Brock, *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*, 114.

the divine remains an image in the eye of the soul 'which is accustomed to matter', for even the 'psychic eye' is unable to reach the spiritual seeing of the mystics.<sup>377</sup>

---

<sup>377</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 98, 487\*. In Book 4, Chapter 15 of the *Ethikon*, Barhebraeus quotes from the poets to corroborate the fact that the 'psychic eye is blinded by the manifestation of God, when it is illuminated by it'.

## Chapter 4: Barhebraeus' Mysticism of the Love of God

### Introduction

Barhebraeus was acquainted first hand with the Arabic texts of medieval Islamic philosophy, but there is a tendency for his philosophical output to be considered separately from his mystical writings. However, a mystical text like the *Book of the Dove* may be seen as a reflection on his compendiums of Aristotelian philosophy, whereby Barhebraeus reconsiders the synthesis of the Aristotelian sciences within Eastern Christian theological discourse. In his mystical texts, Barhebraeus drew on the understanding of the love of God within Syrian monastic spirituality, in order to propose an alternative ontology of God, one that rests on the love of God and goes beyond scholastic metaphysics. The highest understanding of God was thus not an extension of an Aristotelian metaphysics of being, but was received through the revelation of the love of God by the Spirit.

Barhebraeus' account of how he came to immerse himself in monastic spirituality in the *Dove* is well-known, though scholars have pointed out the similarity of this account to al-Ghazālī's 'autobiography' in the *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* and thus to what extent it should be taken literally.<sup>378</sup> Takahashi proceeds to question Barhebraeus' credentials as a mystic, since his mystical texts resemble an encyclopaedic compilation of other such works belonging to the Islamic and Syriac Christian traditions, rather than an original account of his own personal mystical experiences.<sup>379</sup> Yet, for an author to cite other mystics in his texts does not thereby disqualify him as a mystic; in fact, such a dependence on textual

---

<sup>378</sup> See Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 39-41. Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 13. Janssens is sceptical about Barhebraeus' confession of near total despair: 'Cette confession, qui paraît si spontanée, serait plus convaincante si le prototype n'en figurait pas dans le *Munkidh* de Gazali'. Samir Khalil Samir notes the similarity of the opening of the fourth part of the *Dove* 'avec le début de l'autobiographie de Ghazali' in *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, but unlike Janssens, he affirms that 'l'expérience de notre auteur rappelle celle de Ghazālī': Samir, "Cheminement Mystique d'Ibn al-'Ibri (1226-1286)," 75 n.5. The resemblance to al-Ghazālī's work is originally noted in Wensinck's footnote to Barhebraeus' text: Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 60 n.1.

<sup>379</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 40. 'How genuine the mystical experiences recounted by Barhebraeus are and how far advanced he was in his way of mysticism are questions which are not easy to answer, in part because of the personal nature of the matter and in part because we do not as yet know the exact extent to which he depends on his sources in his mystical works.'



authorities may be used as a corrective to the Western emphasis on personal religious experience as the all-determining model for the study of mysticism.<sup>380</sup> Since the interpretation of the textual tradition of the Syrian mystics clearly had a significant role in Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God, these texts will now be examined in some detail.

## The Texts of Barhebraeus' Mysticism

### Categorisation of Barhebraeus' Mystical Texts

In his comprehensive overview of Barhebraeus' oeuvre, entitled *Barhebraeus: a Bio-Bibliography*, Takahashi places Barhebraeus' mystical works into the category of theology, which he divides into three parts: Exegesis, Dogmatic Theology, and Moral Theology and Mysticism.<sup>381</sup> Into this third category of theology, Takahashi places Barhebraeus' mystical texts: the *Ethicon*, the *Book of the Dove*, and also his commentary, *The Book of Excerpts on the Book of the Holy Hierotheos* (*Ktābā d-pushshāqā d-Īrōte'ōs*).<sup>382</sup> While Takahashi's division of Barhebraeus' works has the advantage of clarity, Takahashi makes the assumption that mysticism is associated with moral theology. While this association would seem to uphold the concern of the *Ethicon* and the *Dove* with the practical way of life, moral theology is not addressed in his commentary on the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*. The intrinsic connection of these works as mystical texts thus requires further consideration of Barhebraeus' avowed intentions.

Barhebraeus states in his Preface to the *Ethicon*, that this work is purely concerned with practical knowledge.<sup>383</sup> Wensinck has highlighted the distinction made here by Barhebraeus between practical and speculative knowledge,<sup>384</sup> and considers the *Ethicon* to

---

<sup>380</sup> Colless' conclusion to his article on Barhebraeus' mysticism indicates the predominance of this classical model: 'Finally it has to be said that we have not yet fully established how far Bar Hebraeus depended on his mystic predecessors and how much he relied on his own spiritual experience'. Brian E. Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54, no. 1 (1988): 173.

<sup>381</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 63-67. Takahashi's chronology for Barhebraeus' works is included in Appendix 1.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.

<sup>383</sup> Herman G. B. Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I* (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1993), 5, 8\*. The first page reference refers to Teule's English translation, the second [\*] to the Syriac text.

<sup>384</sup> Wensinck suggests that the monastic distinction in these kinds of knowledge derives from 'the divergence between the anchorites and the coenobites', in which the former devoted themselves to contemplation in

provide ‘books for the practice of religious life, not as speculative works’.<sup>385</sup> In Teule’s translation of the Preface, the distinction made by Barhebraeus is between ‘theoretical knowledge’ and ‘practical’ or ‘active knowledge’. Through theoretical knowledge one may understand ‘that the Creator is one and the world has a beginning’, while through practical knowledge ‘the soul receives illumination by the emaciation of the body’.<sup>386</sup> In the Introduction to the *Dove*, Barhebraeus does not specify that his purpose is to expound one or the other form of knowledge, but within the body of the work he does make reference to both paths when he describes the value of the teacher who guides man towards ‘true contemplation and profitable practice’.<sup>387</sup> Barhebraeus separates the purpose of the *Dove* from that of the *Ethicon*, and the latter work he defines as a book of ethical guidance, which is thus part of gaining practical knowledge.

Teule has argued that the very title of the *Ethicon*, is an unusual one in Syriac ascetical literature, and in fact is borrowed from the philosophical terminology of the pseudo-Aristotelian division of practical philosophy into ‘Ethikon, Oikonomikon and Politikon’, i.e. moral, domestic and civic wisdom.<sup>388</sup> Barhebraeus employs this same division of the three types of practical wisdom in his section on the practical philosophy (as opposed to the theoretical) in his philosophical works, the *Treatise of Treatises*, and the *Cream of Wisdom*.<sup>389</sup> Teule concludes that Barhebraeus borrowed the title of the *Ethicon* from a philosophical rather than an ascetical terminology; for, while Evagrius’ *Scholia in Proverbia* ‘employs the word êthikê to denote the moral or practical part of his doctrine as opposed to the gnostical or “theoretical” part (fusikê and theologikê)’, there appears to be no Syriac

---

solitude in their cells, and the latter lived together in the monasteries and did good works; Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, xxvi.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

<sup>386</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, 5, 7\*. See also the paraphrase of the Preface to the *Ethicon* in Wensinck’s Introduction, thus while speculative knowledge is concerned with understanding for example ‘that God is one and that the world will be destroyed’, practical knowledge involves the soul becoming enlightened through ascetical practice. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>387</sup> *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 10, 529\*. In Wensinck’s edition, there is only the English translation and of course his own Introduction, Notes and Glossary. Wensinck does however indicate precisely how his translation corresponds to the pagination of Bedjan’s edition of the Syriac text, and these are included in the endnote thus [\*], for ease of reference.

<sup>388</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, xix.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

translation of this work that would have made it accessible to Barhebraeus.<sup>390</sup> The more direct terminological influence therefore seems to be Avicennan, raising the question of what was the intended relationship between the *Ethicon* and the summary of the Avicennan-Aristotelian *Ethics* in Barhebraeus' *Cream of Wisdom*, since the same title, *Ktābā d-ītiqōn*, is used for both books.

In the first section of his *Ethics*, Barhebraeus provides the divisions of philosophy into theoretical and practical, and in terms of the ethics, he offers two theories on the subject of this science. The first of these is that since ethics has the human soul as its subject and the choosing of good deeds over the bad, man should therefore know what the human soul is and how its faculties might be used to attain the perfection becoming to it. The second theory is that the ethical science deals not with natural powers, but the governing of the voluntary powers.<sup>391</sup> In the Preface to the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus states that here he is concerned with practical knowledge, 'to distinguish good from evil', rather than the theoretical, which distinguishes 'truth from error'.<sup>392</sup> Therefore the *Ethicon* is aligned with the Aristotelian ethics in its concern with attaining the good, while it also identifies the most sublime Good in the Neoplatonic tradition, in which, following Origen and the Christian Neoplatonists, 'the Good' had been identified with God.

#### **An Overview of the Mystical Texts of Barhebraeus: Editions and Contents**

The main works of Barhebraeus' mysticism, the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove*, will be examined here in terms of their internal structure, editions of the Syriac text as well as modern translations. Paul Bedjan edited Barhebraeus' *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove* in 1898; these Syriac texts appear in the same volume that was published in Paris.<sup>393</sup> Teule notes with regret that Bedjan, despite having free access to the various manuscripts of these two books, was less concerned to compile a critical edition, than to produce a 'sort of

---

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., xviii-xix.

<sup>391</sup> Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 19.

<sup>392</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmṛā I*, 5, 8\*.

<sup>393</sup> Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*.

devotional handbook' for his own Chaldean community.<sup>394</sup> In 1919 A.J. Wensinck produced only a partial translation of Bedjan's Syriac text into English. This translation includes only Chapter XV of Book IV of the *Ethicon*, a chapter which is devoted to the subject of the love of God, and which Teule suggests forms something of 'an appendix' to Wensinck's translation of the *Dove*.<sup>395</sup> Wensinck chose to translate, in its entirety, this much shorter work, in which the same theme of the love of God also holds a significant position. The different aims of these two books account partly for their length, the *Ethicon* is a general work for the readership of the Christian community, which engages in many topics of righteous living, and clearly follows the model of al-Ghazālī's comprehensive multi-volume work, the 'Revival of the Religious Sciences' (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*).<sup>396</sup> As Teule has pointed out, the fourfold structure of the *Ethicon* also imitates that of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* very closely, and thematically both are concerned with practical knowledge.<sup>397</sup>

In Barhebraeus' explanation for the structure of the *Ethicon*, he states that since 'Every activity is either corporeal or psychic', his concern is thus with both. He divides the *Ethicon* into four *mēmre*, the first two parts concerning the training of the body in right conduct and the second two on the soul, its purification and perfection.<sup>398</sup> The fourth part (*Mēmra*) of the *Ethicon* instructs on the way of life for the perfect, the *gmīrē*. Thus, while there are many prescriptions applicable only to lay people, there are also rules for novices and solitaries, as well as sections reserved only for those who have reached mystical perfection.<sup>399</sup> Teule has observed that there is no clear indication of the intended audience

---

<sup>394</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, xii-xiii. Teule states that this lack of a critical edition has not been addressed in the new Syriac edition of these books published by the St Ephrem Monastery in 1985, which is merely a copy of Bedjan's edition. Gregory John Bar Hebraeus, *Ethicon : Christian Ethics (Morals)* ([Glane/Losser] Holland: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery, 1985).

<sup>395</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, xxix.

<sup>396</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethicon*, xvii-xviii.

<sup>397</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, xxxi. Teule represents the parallel structures of these works in a diagram, and also points out the similar efforts by Wensinck in his introduction to Barhebraeus' *Ethicon*, to juxtapose the titles of a select number of chapters and sections in the *Ethicon* and the *Iḥyā'*. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethicon*, cxi-cxxxvi.

<sup>398</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, 5 and 8\*. The first page reference refers to Teule's English translation, the [\*] to the Syriac text.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, xxx.

of the book, leading him to conclude that ‘the aim of the *Ethicon* is to regulate the ethical and mystical life of every Christian believer’, especially that of the lay person.<sup>400</sup>

The fourth *Mēmṛā* lists the acquisition of good qualities in the soul, such as love and repentance.<sup>401</sup> Within this *mēmṛā* are two chapters on the theme of love: Chapter XV on the ‘Love of God’ (translated in full by Wensinck) and Chapter XII on the ‘Love of the Brothers’. Teule gives a brief summary of this latter chapter, noting that the essential content is also discussed in the *Dove*,<sup>402</sup> and that Section XII of this chapter particularly deals with the difference between the two types of love, *ḥubbā* and *reḥmtā*. Love (*ḥubbā*) grows in strength to become *reḥmtā*, a word which Teule has translated using ‘dilection’.<sup>403</sup> The rest of the section essentially follows the distinctions made between these two types of love as seen in the *Homilies* of John of Dalyatha (ca. 690-780CE).<sup>404</sup> His writings provide a precedent for the distinctive nature of *reḥmtā* or ‘dilection’ in Syrian spirituality and primarily suggest dilection to be a state of enjoyment that fulfils the yearning of the lover for the Beloved.<sup>405</sup>

In contrast to the *Ethicon*, the intended audience of the *Dove* is that of novices without a spiritual director.<sup>406</sup> While it offers a parallel treatment of themes contained in the *Ethicon*, it is not simply an edited summary of this much larger work. The *Dove* contains three main sections, which correspond to what had become the standard division of the spiritual life in the Syrian monastic tradition into three degrees (*muṣḥātā*), that of the body, soul and spirit; these form ascending disciplines of training that culminate in spiritual perfection. Brian

---

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., xxxi.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., xxviii. See Section ‘On the Love of the Brethren’, in Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 10-11.

<sup>403</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmṛā I*, xxviii-xxix.

<sup>404</sup> See Colless’ translation of Homily 14: On the Charity and the Love of God. Brian E. Colless, “The Mysticism of John Saba” (PhD, University of Melbourne, 1969), 186-90.

<sup>405</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmṛā I*, xxviii-xxix. This French word ‘dilection’ is also used by Robert Beulay in his works on the mysticism of John of Dalyatha. This term has as its cognate the Latin *dilectio*, found in the works of medieval European mystics such as Bonaventure, and so there is good precedent for its usage in translating the Syrian mystics. While the word is too archaic in English to have modern currency, dilection is preferred in part to avoid confusion since ‘delight’ is used by Wensinck to translate a different term in the Syriac.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., xxx. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 3, 521. Barhebraeus says that he composed the work for ‘sick people who are without or far from a Director’.

Colless has suggested that Barhebraeus follows 'the uniquely Syrian characterisation of the mystical stages as being concerned respectively with body, soul, and spirit'.<sup>407</sup> Indeed the threefold division that is reflected in the structure of the *Book of the Dove* harks back to the fifth century Syrian monk John the Solitary, also called John of Apamea.<sup>408</sup> Barhebraeus' Introduction to the *Dove*, outlines the structure of the book into four parts: the first contains 'instruction concerning the bodily labour accomplished in the monastery', the second describes 'the quality of psychic labour performed in the cell', the third part explains the 'spiritual rest' of the Perfect imparted by the Dove, and which 'introduces them into the divine cloud where the Lord is said to abide'.<sup>409</sup> Indeed the third spiritual part constituting as it does the third degree of the Syrian mystical path, brings the monk into the very presence of God, represented by the divine darkness of the cloud.<sup>410</sup> In the *Book of the Dove*, the most comprehensive treatment of the theme of the love of God occurs in this third chapter on spiritual perfection.

The fourth and final section thus contains the 'centurion', what Teule has termed 'a selection of a hundred mystical and hermetical sayings, intended for the monks to meditate upon'.<sup>411</sup> The inclusion of *centuria* was well known in the Syrian spiritual tradition, and used by Evagrius Ponticus in his *Kephalaia Gnostica (Chapters of Knowledge)*, a work of six chapters or rather *centuria*.<sup>412</sup> This work was known to Barhebraeus, who quotes from it

---

<sup>407</sup> Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 159.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. Colless shows the influence of this division on other Syrian mystics in his article, "The Mysticism of John Saba," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39, no. 1 (1973): 93-96. Beggiani includes a chapter on John the Solitary in his *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality*.

<sup>409</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 3, 522\*. Wensinck's translation of this introductory outline is as follows. 'Into four chapters this book is divided, which is small in extent but great in power. The first [contains] instruction concerning the bodily labour accomplished in the monastery. The second [describes] the quality of psychic labour performed in the cell. The third explains the spiritual rest which the consoling Dove imparts to the Perfect, elevating them to royal rank and introducing them into the divine cloud where the Lord is said to abide. The fourth is a tale of the author's gradual progress in teachings and some sentences communicated to him in revelations.'

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., cv.

<sup>411</sup> Herman Teule, "An Important Concept in Muslim and Christian Mysticism: The Remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah* – 'uḥdōnō d-Alōhō," in *Gotteserlebnis Und Gotteslehre: Christliche Und Islamische Mystik Im Orient*, ed. Martin Tamcke, Göttinger Orientforschungen, Syriaca Reihe 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 12.

<sup>412</sup> Colless points out that the *Kephalaia Gnostica* was only preserved in the Syriac and Armenian versions. Evagrius's Greek writings were condemned after his death as 'Origenism', i.e. the teachings of Origen of Alexandria (c.185-254CE). Brian E. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearls : An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2008), 23.

directly,<sup>413</sup> and also to others such as John of Dalyatha and Isaac of Nineveh, who themselves composed *centuria*.<sup>414</sup> Teule also makes a point of connecting the monastic tradition of composing *centuria*, with that of thirteenth century Sufi writings contemporaneous with Barhebraeus, notably the sayings in the *Hikām*, or ‘words of wisdom’ of Ibn ‘Atā‘ Allāh (1259-1309CE).<sup>415</sup> There seems to be ample precedent for Barhebraeus’ adoption of this genre of writing concise spiritual sentences, both in terms of the legacy of Syrian monasticism and popular contemporary Sufi writings. Moreover, the sentences (Syr. *petgāmē*) of Barhebraeus provide not only a directive for novitiate monks, but are also a reflection of his engagement with philosophy and theology.

In addition, Teule has highlighted in his article *L’amour de Dieu dans l’œuvre de Bar ‘Ebroyo*, a number of poems by Barhebraeus dedicated to theme of divine love, ‘*reḥmtō alohoytō*’, that are yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention and remain exclusively in Syriac and Latin editions.<sup>416</sup> A summary of their contents in the secondary literature indicates that the poems of Barhebraeus cover a variety of standard themes, including praise, philosophy, the description of nature, and less typically, erotic love.<sup>417</sup> Barsoum has stated that aphorism and philosophy are a typical theme within Syriac poetry, and further that many such philosophical odes are to be found amongst Barhebraeus’ poems, which include ‘an exposition of the principles of Socrates’.<sup>418</sup> Takahashi locates the poems of Barhebraeus, referred to variously by their Latin and Syriac titles, *Carmina* and *Mushḥātā* respectively, within the category of *belles lettres*, despite the fact that many of his poems are concerned with themes such as divine knowledge and love, which are explored extensively in his

---

<sup>413</sup> Teule, "Christian Spiritual Sources in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus," 341. Teule lists two citations from Chapters I and III of the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (I.89 and III.64), which are quoted in the *Ethicon*, *Mēmṛā* IV. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les Six Centuries des "Képhalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique. Édition Critique de la Version Syriaque Commune et Édition d'une Nouvelle Version Syriaque Intégrale avec une Double Traduction Française*. T.28, Patrologia Orientalis (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958), 58, 122. Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, 317, 481. Barhebraeus’ second quotation from Evagrius’ *Kephalaia Gnostica* (III.64) is discussed further at Chapter 5, p158.

<sup>414</sup> Teule, "An Important Concept in Muslim and Christian Mysticism: The Remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah* – ‘*uhdōnō d-Alōhō*,” 12.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> For this reason, a study of the poems themselves has not been included in this chapter, see further: "L’amour de Dieu dans L’oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 263-64. Scebab, *Gregorii Bar-Hebraei Carmina*. Dolabani, *Mušḥātā*.

<sup>417</sup> Barsoum and Moosa, *The Scattered Pearls : A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*, 479-80.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., 33.

mystical works. The longest of these poems is his poem on *Divine Wisdom*, which Barsoum declares is 'considered his most superb masterpiece', and is quite unusual in Syriac Poetry for its theme of erotic love or *nasīb*.<sup>419</sup> Teule has suggested that those of Barhebraeus' poems treating the theme of the love of God as an intoxicating wine deserve comparison with the mystical poetry of Ibn al-Farīd (1181-1235CE).<sup>420</sup>

Barhebraeus showed great interest in the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, and searched the monastic libraries West of the Euphrates in order to procure a complete copy in 1269CE, following the request of a monk of the monastery of Mar Mattai, near Mosul.<sup>421</sup> He was sufficiently impressed by its contents to make his own arrangement of the book and to provide a commentary in 1276CE.<sup>422</sup> However, Teule concludes that the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* was 'certainly not included in the normal spiritual reading of the monks of Barhebraeus' times, since no extracts are found in the common spiritual anthologies'.<sup>423</sup> Frothingham has suggested that in making his own compendium, Barhebraeus distorted the meaning in order to impart a more orthodox Christian character, claiming that the translator into Syriac had corrupted the original Greek text, which he himself then sought to rectify.<sup>424</sup> Gherrit Reinink has suggested that Barhebraeus' compendium further 'fostered the popularity and diffusion of its ideas among Jacobite monks in Northern Iraq' of the thirteenth century.<sup>425</sup> He states that the authorship of the work had first been

---

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 34. In Arabic medieval literature, *nasīb* is the generic term for love poetry, which generally addresses the feelings of erotic love for a woman. R. Jacobi, "Nasīb," ed. P. Bearman, et al., Online ed., *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Leiden: Brill Online, 2013).

<sup>420</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 264.

<sup>421</sup> Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 194-96. British Museum manuscript (ADD. 7189), Colophon (p167 b). The description of Barhebraeus' search given by this colophon would seem to coincide with the evidence of the addition of eighty-three new leaves to the manuscript. However, whether the author of the colophon and the copyist of these additional leaves are one and the same hand is questioned by Marsh, despite the conclusions of Wright.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 197-99. This is included in the second British Museum manuscript (ORIENTAL 1017) recorded by Marsh, folios 120b-159a contain the rearrangement, introduction and notes by Barhebraeus.

<sup>423</sup> Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 24.

<sup>424</sup> Arthur Lincoln Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudaili : The Syrian Mystic, and the Book of Hierotheos* (Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1886), 84-89. Frothingham also provides the explanatory introductions provided by Theodosius and Barhebraeus to their commentaries, including the Syriac texts and their translation into English.

<sup>425</sup> G. J. Reinink, "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq," in *After Bardaisan : Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity* ed. Han J. W. Drijvers, Alexander Cornelis Klugkist, and G. J. Reinink, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 240.



questioned by Cyriacus (Patriarch of Antioch from 793 to 817), who had attributed the book to the heretic Stephen bar Šūdhailē and not to Hierotheos.<sup>426</sup> Hence he points out that Barhebraeus seems to have changed his opinion on the issue, since in the *Candelabrum of the Sanctuary* and the *Book of Directions*, he follows Cyriacus' identification of the forgery by the heretic Stephen bar Šūdhailē, while in his introduction to the book, he accepts that the author is Hierotheos. Thus, in the *Candelabrum*, a West Syrian theological encyclopedia composed around 1266-67,<sup>427</sup> Barhebraeus deals with the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* quite simply as the book containing the heretical ideas of the monk Stephen bar Šūdhailē. He specifically refers to what he regards as the central inspiration for the monistic eschatology of Stephen bar Šūdhailē,<sup>428</sup> in the following way, 'and thus even Demons receive grace, and everything returns to the Divine Nature, according as Paul said, "that God may be all in all."<sup>429</sup> However, in the *Dove*, Barhebraeus seemingly quotes with approval the latter part of this doctrine, i.e. the interpretation of St Paul's words as meaning that everything returns to the Divine Nature.<sup>430</sup> It could indeed be, as Reinink suggests, that after having studied its contents for several years and in following the acceptance of the authorship of Hierotheos by Theodosius, who made a commentary of the work in the ninth century, Barhebraeus himself came to accept it as legitimate.<sup>431</sup>

#### The Monastic Sources for Barhebraeus' Spiritual Works

Early Syrian asceticism was profoundly influenced by Egyptian monastic authors such as Evagrius Ponticus, whose writings originally written in Greek became particularly prominent in the Syrian tradition of monastic spirituality.<sup>432</sup> This trend rested on the

---

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>427</sup> Herman Teule, "Barhebraeus," in *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History. Volume 4, (1200-1350)*, ed. David Thomas, Alexander Mallett, and Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, History of Christian-Muslim Relations (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012), 595.

<sup>428</sup> The mysticism of Stephen bar Šūdhailē has often been referred to as 'pantheism' in scholarship on Syriac studies, however his monistic eschatology derives from a Neoplatonic cosmology.

<sup>429</sup> See Marsh's translation, Section III. Extract from "The Lamp of the Sanctuary; concerning the Ecclesiastical Foundations", in: Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 175, 64\*.

<sup>430</sup> For further discussion of this point, see the later section of on the 'Unification of the Mind'.

<sup>431</sup> Reinink, "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq," 239-40.

<sup>432</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 172-75.

translation of the Greek writings into Syriac during the fifth and sixth centuries, which effected a transformation in the monastic vocabulary. In their Introduction to *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature*, Grigory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra state that Syriac spirituality has its own unique features and Semitic background, but note that it 'also relies extensively on the Greek patristic tradition'.<sup>433</sup> Despite the fact that the Syriac translation of Greek mystical works ended around the time of the Muslim invasions in the seventh century, with the *Scala Paradisi* of John Climacus (525-606CE), a monk from the monastery of Mount Sinai, probably being the last such work to be translated,<sup>434</sup> the influence of the Greek mystical writings can be seen in Barhebraeus' mysticism. This emerges especially in the key figures and themes included in Barhebraeus' mystical writing. In the introduction to part four of the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus identifies the 'Aba Evagrius', as playing a particularly significant role in his own spiritual progress.<sup>435</sup> In addition, the apophatic teaching of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, also impacted Barhebraeus' mysticism. The studies of Robert Beulay have shown that John Sābā (also known as John of Dalyatha) was heavily influenced by the ideas of these two mystical writers, particularly in his placing of ecstasy at the interior of the divine darkness (from the Pseudo-Dionysian *Mystical Theology*). His giving of a dynamic character, to this darkness which emanates rays of light, likely draws from Gregory of Nyssa's notion of an infinite progress in the vision of God.<sup>436</sup> Barhebraeus does deploy the Dionysian image of the 'divine darkness' (derived from Gregory of Nyssa), in which the One is grasped in an ignorance of all that can be known.<sup>437</sup> It may well be the case that some of these ideas came to influence the mysticism of Barhebraeus through his reading of John of Dalyatha.

---

<sup>433</sup> Grigory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra, *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature*, Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven ; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), 2.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>435</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61, 578\*.

<sup>436</sup> Robert Beulay, "Formes de Lumière et Lumière Sans Forme: Le Thème de la Lumière dans la Mystique de Jean de Dalyatha," in *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont : Contributions À L'étude des Christianismes Orientaux, avec une Bibliographie du Dédicataire*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, Cahiers D'orientalisme (Genève: Cramer, 1988), 135.

<sup>437</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, Library of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality (London: Faith Press, 1963), 100.

John of Dalyatha is one of Barhebraeus' favoured spiritual authorities and who is in Teule's estimation, 'probably the most quoted *Syriac* author in the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove*'.<sup>438</sup> Teule points out that only during the twelfth century, the century directly preceding Barhebraeus, did the writings of John Sābā come to be appreciated by the West Syrian monks, who 'inserted important extracts into their spiritual compilations'.<sup>439</sup> While it seems likely that Barhebraeus used such monastic compendia, Teule concludes that since he did not include quotations from John of Dalyatha's *Letters* in the *Ethicon*, he cannot have had access to those West Syrian compendia devoted almost exclusively to John's works, and including both the *Letters* and the *Homilies* in particular.<sup>440</sup> Teule also emphasises that Barhebraeus' chapter on the love of God in the *Ethicon* is unique in Syriac literature, due to his systematic approach that characterises his work in general. Indeed while other Syrian monastic authors such as Isaac of Nineveh (d. c. 700CE) and John Sābā give comparable reflections and meditations devoted to the theme of the love of God, their work is not analytical in the manner typifying Barhebraeus.<sup>441</sup>

#### The Syrian Dionysian Tradition

Barhebraeus provides two specific quotations from the 'Great Dionysius (Areopagita)', in the *Ethicon Mēmṛā* 3, which correspond to Pseudo-Dionysius' *The Divine Names* and *Letter V*.<sup>442</sup> Teule also notes that apart from one isolated extract, Pseudo-Dionysius' work is not to be found within the West Syrian monastic compilations.<sup>443</sup> This would seem to indicate that Barhebraeus had some direct access to the texts of Pseudo-Dionysius that he quotes, since he did not simply lift these quotations from an anthology. From the fact that Barhebraeus quotes directly from Pseudo-Dionysius' work of *The Divine Names*, it would seem that he was acquainted with its teachings. Colless suggests that despite Barhebraeus only making two direct references in his writings to Pseudo-Dionysius (once in the *Ethicon* and in the

---

<sup>438</sup> Teule, "Christian Spiritual Sources in the *Ethicon* of Barhebraeus," 342.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 351. Teule gives details of the inclusion of John of Dalyatha's works in five such monastic spiritual anthologies, which include selections from the *Homilies*, the *Letters*, the *Discourses*, and *Chapters of Knowledge*.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>441</sup> "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 263.

<sup>442</sup> "Christian Spiritual Sources in the *Ethicon* of Barhebraeus," 346. Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, 315.

<sup>443</sup> Teule, "Christian Spiritual Sources in the *Ethicon* of Barhebraeus," 353.

*Dove* respectively), 'his influence extends much deeper than this fact would indicate'.<sup>444</sup> The *Ethicon* and particularly the *Dove* betray many other Dionysian motifs that can be traced to the Pseudo-Dionysian works which are thought to be composed at the beginning of the sixth century by a Syrian monk who adopted the identity of Dionysius, the disciple of St Paul.<sup>445</sup> His writings had considerable impact both in the East and West. The Syrian Orthodox theologian Severos of Antioch (d. 538CE), accepted the Areopagite's writings as genuine and Sergius of Resh'aina translated them from Greek into Syriac, while the Latin translation by Erigena in 858, was followed by commentaries of the scholastics, including Albert Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure (c. 1221-1274CE).<sup>446</sup>

Certain Dionysian concepts are also of considerable significance in Barhebraeus' mysticism. However, these have been reinterpreted to form part of his understanding of the love of God that is distinct from the Dionysian metaphysics of *eros*. Other typically Dionysian concepts also evident in Barhebraeus' mysticism, include 'deification' (Gr. *theosis*) and the 'cloud' (Syr. '*arpelā*'; Gr. *gnophos*) of divine darkness, from Pseudo-Dionysius' *Mystical Theology*.<sup>447</sup> Barhebraeus makes many other references to the cloud, as noted by Wensinck, though he does not quote the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>448</sup> Both Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha use the term '*arpelā*', and the latter author is quoted twice by Barhebraeus in the *Ethicon*, with reference to the vision of God's glory in clouds of light.<sup>449</sup>

These Dionysian concepts also occur in the related Syriac mystical work, the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, whose author identifies himself as the very same Hierotheos whom the Pseudo-Dionysius claims as his teacher. Both attributions are pseudonymous, the identity of the Pseudo-Dionysius remains unknown, while the book of the disciple of St Paul, Hierotheos, supposedly the teacher of Dionysius, was actually written by a West Syrian

---

<sup>444</sup> Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 155.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> *The Wisdom of the Pearlers : An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism*, 37-39.

<sup>447</sup> "The Mysticism of John Saba," 101.

<sup>448</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, ciii-civ, 193\*, 487\*, 98\*, 505\*.

<sup>449</sup> See Wensinck's Introduction, with references to Bedjan's text of the *Ethikon*. Ibid., civ-cv, 10\*, 103\*.

monk also in the sixth century, Stephen bar Šūdhailē.<sup>450</sup> Colless categorises the book as ‘an amalgam of Evagrianism and Dionysianism’, with an emphasis on the type of knowledge which he translates using the terms ‘ignorance’, ‘non-knowledge’, or ‘hyper-knowledge’.<sup>451</sup> However, other scholars consider the connection between the actual writings of these two pseudonymous authors to be more tenuous. Irénée Hausherr has suggested that despite the claim by the author of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* that Dionysius was his teacher, the composition of this book was well after the time of the Pseudo-Dionysian writings (first appearing in 520), and that its central ideas were based not on Pseudo-Dionysius, but Evagrius.<sup>452</sup> However, Rosemary A. Arthur has argued, along with Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, for the most likely date for the composition of the Dionysian corpus as during the 520s, in a revision of the previously accepted dating.<sup>453</sup> Since Stephen bar Šūdhailē is supposed to have flourished between 510 and 520 (in Hausherr’s estimation), there is no reason to presume the priority of either writer, Arthur argues, solely on the grounds of dating their works.<sup>454</sup> Modern scholarship has thus continued to debate the influences on Stephen bar Šūdhailē and his influence on other figures, particularly the nature of the relation between the pseudo-epigraphical works of Hierotheos and Dionysius.

---

<sup>450</sup> Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 155.

<sup>451</sup> "The Mysticism of John Saba," 100-01.

<sup>452</sup> Hausherr discusses the conclusions of A. L. Frothingham at some length in Section 4, 'L'influence du «Livre de Saint Hiérophée»'. Irénée Hausherr, "De Doctrina Spirituali Christianorum Orientalium, Quaestiones et Scripta, I" *Orientalia Christiana* 30, no. 3 (1933): 184, 94. Frothingham, *Stephen Bar Sudaile: The Syrian Mystic, and the Book of Hierotheos*, 58-59.

<sup>453</sup> Rosemary A. Arthur, "A Sixth-Century Origenist: Stephen Bar Sudaile and His Relationship with Ps-Dionysius" (paper presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1991), 369. Arthur refers to the dating of the corpus suggested by Rorem and Lamoreaux, see further: Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 10-15.

<sup>454</sup> Arthur, "A Sixth-Century Origenist: Stephen Bar Sudaile and His Relationship with Ps-Dionysius," 369. Arthur refers to the argument of Irénée Hausherr for this dating of Stephen's activities. Hausherr, "De Doctrina Spirituali Christianorum Orientalium, Quaestiones et Scripta, I" 196-97.

## The Knowledge of God and Neoplatonic contemplation

In the one hundred sentences of the *Book of the Dove*, the love of God surpasses all other means of knowing God. For Barhebraeus, the love of God overcomes the seeking of knowledge of God in terms of His Being. Barhebraeus emphasises in the *Dove*, the way of the 'faith founded on revelations',<sup>455</sup> which demands quite a different path to the necessary and natural knowledge of God. This higher and much more difficult path is to know through direct illumination, the way of those initiated into this path, by their monastic elders. What identifies faith (*haymānūtā*) is the knowledge by the Initiated of the love of God, a knowledge that is received as a gift and not acquired by one's own effort, and thus is knowledge through revelations. Barhebraeus states that the Initiated 'know His divinity by essential knowledge' and this essential knowledge forms 'the foundation of their love'.<sup>456</sup> Here, Barhebraeus is reiterating notions found in the writings of seventh century East Syrian mystics such as Isaac of Nineveh, concerning the divine revelation of spiritual and essential knowledge, which surpasses that of the philosophers.<sup>457</sup>

Isaac of Nineveh hailed from the Church of the East, but by the ninth century his writings had crossed over the Eastern denominations, coming to be read and appreciated by the Syrian Orthodox monks, amongst others.<sup>458</sup> Indeed Isaac's criticism of philosophy (*pīlāsāwpūtā*) is picked up in the writings of his later seventh century monastic contemporaries, Dadīšō of Bet Qaṭrāyē and Simeon d-Taybūṭēh.<sup>459</sup> Isaac characterises philosophy as a 'downwards knowledge', in quoting Basil of Caesarea, which is 'a converse which opens up the door so that we can peer (*ndīq*) down into knowledge of created beings, and not up into spiritual mysteries'. According to Isaac, in a further paraphrase of Basil's

---

<sup>455</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 65, 583\*, Sentences 19-20.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 55, 573\*. Here, Barhebraeus recognises that even faith has tended to become a matter of tradition followed blindly by the common faithful, which he calls 'shadowy faith' in Sentence 20.

<sup>457</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 184-86.

<sup>458</sup> For the further influence of Isaac, even beyond the Middle East - Sebastian P. Brock, "From Qatar to Tokyo, by Way of Mar Saba: The Translations of Isaac of Beth Qaṭraye (Isaac the Syrian)," *ARAM Periodical* 12 (2000).

<sup>459</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 188-91.

letter, spiritual mysteries are seen through Evagrius' 'ladder of the intellect', and 'the being raised up above all ordinary vision'.<sup>460</sup> Dadišō also distinguishes the spirituality of the ascetics from the endeavours of the 'school-men' (*eskōlāyē*) who devote themselves to the 'learning of reason (*yullphānā da-mlilūtā*)' from the books of Aristotle.<sup>461</sup> By contrast, the West Syrian philosopher Sergius of Resh'aina followed the tradition of the Greek authors of ascetic spirituality as the 'true philosophy',<sup>462</sup> rather than viewing their form of spirituality in opposition to philosophy *per se*. Thus Barhebraeus, while drawing on the East Syrian spiritual tradition, especially Isaac's notion of revelation as a gift which comes by the power of the Holy Spirit,<sup>463</sup> combines these insights with the more holistic view of philosophy outlined in the spiritual curriculum of Sergius of Resh'aina. Barhebraeus does not adopt the 'anti-intellectual tradition' of the East Syrian ascetics.<sup>464</sup> Furthermore, such a distinction between scholastic philosophy and ascetic spirituality does not seem to have occurred in the same way for the West Syrians, where both activities were located in the monastic centres, in contrast to the East Syrian school system.<sup>465</sup>

In Barhebraeus' chapter on solitude in the *Book of the Dove*, the greatest profit of solitude is 'spiritual enjoyment', acquired 'by the true knowledge of the divine nature'.<sup>466</sup> Barhebraeus states that the knowledge of God which is sought through syllogisms, enslaves the mind to 'time and place', while it is the labours of soul and body in 'solitude and silence' (*w-šelyā w-šetqā*),<sup>467</sup> that brings illumination to the mind by divine revelations.<sup>468</sup> The receiving of 'revelations' (*gulyānē*) from the Spirit, confirms the understanding of God received by *theōria*. Indeed he states that his sentences will only profit those who have 'trained in the

---

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 188-90.

<sup>462</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 67.

<sup>463</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 185-6.

<sup>464</sup> King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 69.

<sup>465</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 64-68.

<sup>466</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 20, 539\*.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 79, 597\*, Sentence 95. 'When you wish to give rest to your mind from attaining profound questions by syllogistic intricacies, and you will acquire solitude and silence with steady labours, then be patient, and be not dejected in your way. Ere long your sun will rise and illuminate your evening and show you your beauty and liberate you from the slavery of time and place.'

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 79, 597\*, Sentence 93.

knowledge of divine and human practice, longing to see in revelations those things which his speculation has reached'.<sup>469</sup> Thus alongside the distinction between knowledge gained by revelations and knowledge by *tēoriya*, Barhebraeus makes a further distinction between practical and theoretical or speculative knowledge, asserting the necessity of both types of knowledge. He emphasises a longing for what goes beyond the acquirement of practical and theoretical knowledge, to see by revelations, what lies beyond the noetic. The Syriac term, *tēoriya*, is a loan word from Greek philosophy, which became widely used in the Syrian tradition with the translation of the Greek writings of Evagrius in the fifth century, and subsequently with the translation of the Dionysian corpus by Sergius of Resh'aina.<sup>470</sup> For the translator and philosopher Sergius, the attainment of *theōria* is 'the highest knowledge' of the Supreme Being, to which all men aspire.<sup>471</sup> Sergius, as we have seen already, was greatly influenced also by Evagrius. In Evagrian spiritual theology, practice was necessary for acquiring the detachment of *apatheia*, or 'passionlessness', and this was essential for progress to the second stage of contemplation or *theōria*.<sup>472</sup> In Brock's article on *theōria*, he indicates the elements in Isaac's *tēoriya* which are particularly Evagrian in origin, and how certain elements of *tēoriya* had 'gained currency' in the contemporary seventh century Syriac monastic writers.<sup>473</sup> Amongst the East Syrian mystics, *tēoriya* was understood slightly differently from the Greek philosophical term itself, which can be seen in the kind of definitions of *tēoriya* given by Isaac of Nineveh, such as 'spiritual prayer', 'spiritual vision' and 'vision of the soul'.<sup>474</sup> West Syrians like Sergius and Barhebraeus also adopted the Evagrian tradition of *theōria*, but not without recognising its philosophical background. In doing so, these philosophers presented a more harmonised understanding of the role of both *theōria* and *praxis*, in the spiritual life.

---

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., 80, 598\*, Sentence 98.

<sup>470</sup> See Sebastian P. Brock, "Some Uses of the Term Theoria in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh," *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995). In the seventh century, significant usage of the term is made by Babai's commentary on the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, Gregory of Cyprus, Isaac of Nineveh and Simeon d-Taybūṭēh.

<sup>471</sup> King, "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation." Sergius provides this comment to his translation of Alexander's treatise, 'Because of this we say accurately that everything desires the Being. It seems that also among men the knowledge of Him - what we call *theoria* - is their [men's] fulfilment, because knowledge is the highest blessedness and fulfilment [that exists] for men... and the head of all knowledge is *theoria* of Him.'

<sup>472</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition*, 44-45.

<sup>473</sup> Brock, "Some Uses of the Term Theoria in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh," 409.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid.



The notion of *tēoriya* that became so influential for the Syriac spiritual writers, who followed the thought of Origen and Evagrius, is highly Neoplatonic.<sup>475</sup> Evagrius conceived of humanity as being ‘fallen intellects’, given bodies for the purpose of returning to God through the stages of purification of the intellect in order to achieve ‘union with the Godhead through knowledge’.<sup>476</sup> Seely Beggiani contrasts Evagrianism with the mysticism of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom the intellect must ultimately surrender itself, in order ‘to reach a level of ignorance which is above any human knowledge’.<sup>477</sup> In the presence of the Divine, a region thus represented as darkness, Beggiani says that ‘The intellect ceases to function, and no further human understanding (*theōria*) is possible.’<sup>478</sup> Barhebraeus does move in this direction, but he does not speak precisely of the goal of ignorance or surrender of the intellect, instead of a moving beyond the capacities of the intellect, towards the love of God. In a section of the *Ethicon* wherein he quotes various sayings of the Initiated about love, he cites the following: ‘Love is the power which springs from nature and superates the will. The mind cannot attain it, nor can the tongue explain it.’<sup>479</sup>

Barhebraeus uses the term *tēoriya* not only for the Initiated, as they are engaged in ‘contemplation’, but also for the theoretical sciences of the philosophers, who are engaged in ‘speculation’. Wensinck uses these alternative translations of *tēoriya*, contemplation and speculation, to distinguish between the approaches of these two groups.<sup>480</sup> However, when Barhebraeus objects to ‘speculation’ as the sole means of understanding the nature of God, he does not seem to be referring only to the methods of the philosophers. Indeed he admits that he cannot reject *tēoriya*, ‘since esoteric teachers and exoteric sages, by their intricate ways of thought, have ascended to astonishing heights of knowledge’.<sup>481</sup> This would seem to include both the ‘exoteric’ sciences of philosophy and theology, as well as the ‘esoteric’

---

<sup>475</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition*, 43.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 113, 503\*.

<sup>480</sup> See for his example his Glossary for entry no. 30. Ibid., 142.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid., 79, 597\*, Sentence 94.

writings of the Initiated that he mentions in the introduction to Book IV of the *Dove*, i.e. Evagrius and others of the East and West.<sup>482</sup> Barhebraeus relativizes both the limitations of metaphysical speculation, which rationalises the divine being through syllogisms and logic, and spiritual contemplation, in its aspiration towards a return of the intellect to God through the means of noetic training.

However, the heights of *theōria* are not the final stage. This is only achieved by the work of the Spirit, when the Dove gives spiritual rest to the Perfect, after the labours of the body in the monastery and of the soul in the cell, whereby practical and theoretical knowledge is acquired in preparation for the gifts of the dove. For Barhebraeus, contemplation or *teorya* is an intermediate stage that leads the Initiated towards receiving the revelations that are given by the Spirit. Instead, Barhebraeus emphasises the God who is pure spirit, particularly in the *Dove* where he quotes the instruction of a ‘certain Master’ to his disciple: ‘For God is spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Stay therefore in your cell and strive to see in yourself Him who is near to all.’<sup>483</sup> In the inspired sentences, Barhebraeus declares his desire for something of ‘the true light of the Beautiful one’, so that ‘I may no longer adore Him that I know not, but Him, that I know in spirit and truth’.<sup>484</sup> To know in spirit and in truth, is to know by the true revelations of the spirit, and to seek in love the Lord Himself and ‘not what belongs to Him’.<sup>485</sup> For he declares that the ‘knowledge of the perfect is founded on revelations’,<sup>486</sup> revelations which are bestowed on those who learn the ‘mysteries of the spirit from the spirit’.<sup>487</sup>

## The Ontology of the Love of God

---

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., 61, 578\*.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid., 32, 550\*.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 75, 593\*, Sentence 79.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 77, 595\*, Sentence 84.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 70, 588\*, Sentence 50.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 71, 589\*, Sentence 55.

In part four of the *Dove*, Barhebraeus contrasts the practice of philosophical speculation, specifically the rationalising of the divine being through syllogistic reasoning, with the illumination of the mind by the Spirit. For Barhebraeus the mind in itself is only capable of understanding God according to its own capacities, and thus if God governs all, he asks how God could then be comprehended in entirety by the mind: 'For the included comprehends only a part of the including, not the whole.'<sup>488</sup> Barhebraeus does not reject 'speculation' (*tēoriya*) as a means of pursuing theoretical knowledge, nor does he negate the speculative methods of the philosophers entirely,<sup>489</sup> but rather, that the lines of inquiry pursued by this type of reasoning have brought a manner of thinking about God that is insufficient for the God revealed as love in biblical revelation. Barhebraeus' understanding of the ontology of God through the love of God provides a solution to the problems of pursuing speculative reasoning about the being of God.

In order to appreciate the significance of Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God, his understanding of the ontology of God needs to be explored in terms of its philosophical ground in the metaphysics of Aristotle and the Neoplatonic philosophers. Barhebraeus' mysticism mediated between the scholastic tradition of Aristotelian metaphysics that stressed God as 'the unique supreme being',<sup>490</sup> and a Neoplatonic Dionysian metaphysics of love that rested on the divine name of the Good. Thus, Barhebraeus incorporated both the Aristotelian metaphysics of God as a supreme being amongst beings, with the Platonic emphasis on God as the Good. The Neoplatonists had wielded a much more significant influence over the Syrian mystics from the fifth to the eighth centuries, particularly Pseudo-Dionysius and Stephen bar Šūdhailē, whose works contain many of the features distinctive of the Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus and Proclus. Barhebraeus prefers the nomination of God coming from this Neoplatonic tradition, that is, God as the Good and 'the Beautiful one', whose highest contemplation comes in the hidden cloud of divine darkness.<sup>491</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 63, 581\*, Sentence 9.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid., 79, 597\*, Sentence 94. 'By that which I have said, and say and shall say, I do not reject speculation... But when I see that some of them have dared to weigh all in their scale, their boast does not seem beautiful to me.'

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 66-67, 585\*, Sentence 29.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 64, 582\*, Sentence 15.

Knowledge of this God, rather than the divine being of metaphysics, cannot be explained or described by the Initiated.<sup>492</sup>

Barhebraeus insists that 'What is three in itself possesses a unique essential idea, which is not liable to be divided into many triads; and in this intelligence it is one.'<sup>493</sup> The notion of triads is characteristic of Neoplatonism, and Barhebraeus is clearly rejecting the kind of system taught by Plotinus, in which from the One emanates the Divine Mind and the World Soul. Instead the principle of a single intelligence or essential idea for Barhebraeus is also 'the unique supreme being' that is three in its possession of 'essence and word and life'.<sup>494</sup> In theological terms, these become the Father who causes the word and the life, as the Son and the Spirit. However, Barhebraeus maintains that 'the cause of the word and the life of the essence cannot be outside the essence', since the Spirit and the Son have not been subject to 'the influence of an other being'.<sup>495</sup> Therefore Barhebraeus appears to find a middle path between an Aristotelian inspired notion of the *theion*, the highest Being of all beings, and a monistic understanding of a single source of reality in the Neoplatonic One. Barhebraeus's notion of the One is not however beyond being, in the sense of external to creation, since 'He has revealed himself unto the world in the complete son of man, who has become soul in the rational and recognizing initiated soul'.<sup>496</sup> Therefore Barhebraeus accords a place to the rational investigation of a God who has revealed Himself in creation, and thus is present in the being of the world through the 'intermediary' of created bodies.<sup>497</sup> However, these are but 'the reflexes of a mirror', for the corporeal and incorporeal kingdoms 'have no true essence in themselves, but their essence depends upon the first essence, their cause'.<sup>498</sup> God is therefore called the Supreme Being, the first essence,

---

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 75-76, 593-94\*, Sentences 80-81. Barhebraeus recounts the words of an Initiated concerning his experiences: 'Hear me, hear me and be silent. But say not to me: explain and describe'.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 66-7, 585\*, Sentence 29.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid., 67, 585\*.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 67, 585\*, Sentence 33.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 67, 585\*, Sentence 32. 'If God, the creator of the universe, acts according to His will, it is not impossible for the creatures to investigate Him by the intermediary of any [created] body, whatever it be.'

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 68, 586\*, Sentence 38.

or even 'the supreme Essence'.<sup>499</sup> That 'God is one, and necessarily being' is declared by Barhebraeus to be true knowledge of the mind.<sup>500</sup>

Indeed it is clear from the final part of the *Book of the Dove* that for Barhebraeus the mind is not capable of seeing the true nature of God, for it is limited to comprehending the divine in terms of its own being. Barhebraeus accepts that God may be understood through being, and indeed this is the natural tendency of the mind to comprehend the laws of nature governing its own existence. God may thus be investigated from the evidence of divine creation. However, this type of inquiry cannot reach a true understanding of God, who cannot be fully comprehended by the mind, through 'information, signs and testimonies', or from 'complicated deliberations', but only through 'shutting the senses' to all such attempts to know God, in order to see God through 'opening the windows of the heart'.<sup>501</sup> In this manner, the mind may leave behind the 'elementary knowledge' attained in this world, to penetrate the divine cloud, and so 'to know the hidden and incomprehensible judgments of the divinity'.<sup>502</sup>

The understanding of the rational soul is that of simple knowledge, since it is 'a receptacle of material apperceptions', and 'no material thing is a receptacle of intellectual apperceptions'.<sup>503</sup> This common and simple knowledge is able to 'recognize from the creatures their creator', while the sages possess a kind of knowledge 'by which from the being he whose being is necessary is recognised'. The metaphysical speculation of the philosophers is founded on the logic that since man is a potential being, then he wants a necessary being, and thus there is a necessary being in the divine being.<sup>504</sup> Barhebraeus does accept the ontological division of the Creator from the created, but he suggests two ways of knowing God as the Creator. The first is that the direct knowledge of the Creator teaches of the created, while the second way of knowledge is to know the Creator through

---

<sup>499</sup> Ibid., 66, 584\*, Sentence 24.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 77, 595\*, Sentence 88.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 63-4, 581\*, Sentences 9-12. For the seeing of God in the heart; *ibid.*, 68-69, 587\*, Sentence 41.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 64, 582\*, Sentence 13.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 74, 592\*, Sentence 71.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 74, 592\*, Sentence 73.

creation; the latter is the easier path.<sup>505</sup> The first way to the knowledge of God is possessed by the Initiated, which is knowledge given by the illumination of the mind through which the love of God is nourished in the pure heart.<sup>506</sup> Barhebraeus contrasts the second way of knowledge through metaphysical speculation with the intuitive knowledge of the Initiated, whose knowledge goes beyond the senses. He offers a critique of the scholastic trend in Syrian theology, to treat God as an extension of created being, and thus to make rational conclusions about God based on metaphysical speculation about the nature of created being. In this typology of the ways of knowing God, Barhebraeus introduces a third approach that supersedes these two ways of knowing God; this third way is through revealed knowledge. Instead of understanding the ontology of God in terms of metaphysics, the highest understanding of the Initiated comes through the revelation of the love of God. The Initiated thus possess spiritual insight through revelation, by which 'the tabernacle of their heart is illuminated' and the kingdom of God comes to exist within them. By this indwelling of the Spirit, the mind becomes 'enflamed by the love of its Lord'.<sup>507</sup>

#### The Divine Spark of Love

Barhebraeus devotes a long section to describing the growth of the love of God in the heart, how it must be nourished in devotional and practical life and the stages that the initiate or novice must go through, in order for love to purify the heart of all earthly passions and to reach ultimately the desired object of his love. His preferred image of love is that of the divine fire as it operates in the inner person, possibly because of the popularity of the imagery of love as a purifying fire in the writings of the Syrian mystics. This is particularly evident in his quotations of the sayings of 'the Initiated', as well as in his unacknowledged use of written sources. The first saying listed in the final part of Chapter 15 of the *Ethicon*, defines love precisely using the standard image of fire: 'Love is the divine fire which burns in the elect and banishes and destroys from their hearts every other desire which is impure.'<sup>508</sup> There is a practical sense to the effect of this divine fire of love for the Syrian ascetics, since the love of God has such a transformative effect on its practitioners that it

---

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 54-55, 593\*; 95, 484\*. Barhebraeus makes this distinction in both the *Dove* and the *Ethicon*.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid., 95, 484\*.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid., 74, 592\*, Sentences 74-75.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid., 113, 502\*.

acts within them as a fire, burning away impure desires. Most of the sayings listed in this chapter concern the love of God as a divine fire at work in the heart of the inner man.

The divine fire of love is portrayed by Barhebraeus as something that operates in the hearts of the Initiated, but he also deploys another image of the love of God as it operates amongst the common faithful. In the *Ethicon* he states that 'no single believing heart is devoid of the root of the love of God', and yet he warns that many of the faithful lack 'the growth of the tree of the love of God, the splendour of its flowers and the burden of its fruits'.<sup>509</sup> Barhebraeus goes on to describe two causes by which the root of love grows in the heart of the righteous, the first being that man turns away from all earthly things, 'seeking and desiring the One only', so that 'while his inner being is cleansed, his mind is purified, he becomes one of the pure in heart, that see God. And by this sight, the fire of love is kindled'.<sup>510</sup> The second is that man grows in the knowledge of God and becomes 'illuminated and instructed' by it, after the heart has been purified from the passions, and so 'from the seed of knowledge love is born and grows up'.<sup>511</sup>

The growth of the love of God is cultivated by those initiated into the *mūṣḥātā*, 'stages or degrees', of love, which Barhebraeus outlines in both the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove*.<sup>512</sup> In Chapter 15 of Book 4 of the *Ethicon*, he describes the growth of the love of God in some detail in one continuous section that focuses on the three stages of the Initiated in the growth of their love of God.<sup>513</sup> Barhebraeus states that the division of 'the growth of love' into three stages itself originates with the teachings of 'the holy solitaires', and that these stages are quite simply 'the first, the middle, and the third, the last one being that of accomplishment'.<sup>514</sup> He acknowledges in his description of the progress in the love of God, that he borrows the words of these holy teachers, but does not cite any by name. The first

---

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 94, 483\*.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 94, 484\*.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 95, 484\*.

<sup>512</sup> For Barhebraeus' use of the term *mūṣḥātā*, and its relation to Arabic Sufi equivalents, see Herman Teule, "The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus" (paper presented at the The Image of the Perfect Christian in Patristic Thought Lviv, Ukraine, 2009), 198.

<sup>513</sup> *Ethicon*, IV.15.13. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 107-10, 496-99\*. cf. *Book of the Dove*, III.1. Ibid., 46-47, 565\*.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 107, 496\*.

stage of love begins when ‘grace casts a small spark of the love of the Lord in the heart of the novice’.<sup>515</sup> This small spark of love incites him to the love of serving his brethren, as well as those in need, and gives him ‘silence and solitude’ (*w-šetqā w-šelyā*) in order to purify his heart of the ‘passionate inclinations’. In the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus designates this initial stage as the beginning of perfection, but this time it is the dove rather than grace, who shows herself in her beauty ‘as a flash of lightening’, to the soul who becomes stupefied and ‘captivated by desire for her’.<sup>516</sup> Those blessed with the gift of divine love, are thus receivers of the divine spark of love from the dove.

The growth of the love of God is thus a dynamic process; through ‘seeking and desiring the Good one alone’ and purifying the ‘inner heart’, the Initiate is granted a glimpse of ‘the rays of the Essence’. Thus the ‘small spark of love’ in the heart will be inflamed, to ‘become a mighty flame, making the soul blaze’.<sup>517</sup> With the kindling of this spark of love, the lover of God ‘thirsts to behold Him, longing after [the time] when he shall come and see His face’.<sup>518</sup> The stages to perfection in the love of God are thus characterised by feelings of longing for the beloved, expressed variously as the yearning to see the divine beauty or for vision of the beautiful. The language of divine love as a fire is used to imagine its operations in the heart of the lover in the progress towards perfection and vision. To receive the gift of love is not merely a passive act on the part of the receiver, but requires the transformation of the inner person.

In the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus declares that the receiving of ‘divine revelations’ and ‘spiritual visions’ to the Initiated occurs in solitude (*šelyā*), stating that ‘[s]uch solitude is called by the teachers a solitude which makes gods’.<sup>519</sup> He also declares that through this quiet solitude, ‘the mind acquires complete unification and perfect mingling with God, and vision and knowledge of Him’.<sup>520</sup> The mind’s acquisition of this kind of vision and knowledge of

---

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 46, 564\*.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 53-54, 571-72\*.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 54, 571\*.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 103, 491-92\*.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 103, 492\*.



God is however, 'without visible vision and without knowable knowledge'.<sup>521</sup> This he describes as a grace which will bring further consolation, especially that of freedom of speech, which happens through the spirit of the son that 'dwells in the perfect'. When the spiritual son of God thus 'speaks freely with God', he then becomes 'the same as the person who dwells within him'.<sup>522</sup> Indeed Barhebraeus ranks the spiritual stage as that of perfection, when the mind of the Initiated is illuminated through the revelations of the spiritual dove. In the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus describes this stage of perfection in more detail, whereby the mind 'acquires perfect freedom of speech with the dove', who abides 'in her nest, the heart' (of the perfect).<sup>523</sup> Then the mind ascends on the wings of the dove, 'from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit', and in the inaccessible light of the divine abode, 'it sees itself in the likeness of God'.<sup>524</sup>

#### The Divine Dwelling

The *Book of the Dove* repeatedly connects the image of the dove and the cloud, since the mind ascends, on the wings of the dove, to the dwelling place of God in the cloud. The dove is thus portrayed almost as a messenger of divine love, in the call of love which is her 'cooing' and the state of longing and stupefaction that she engenders in the human soul. The flight of the soul on the wings of the dove is thus an ascent in love, in which the lover is brought to behold the object of his love in the cloud. The flight of the mind on the wings of the dove towards 'the cloud of inaccessible light', which it enters to become 'radiant' in the beauty of the Lord, culminates in the notion of encountering God in the divine dwelling place.<sup>525</sup> In a section of the *Ethicon* entitled 'Why the Creatures do not know the Creator', Barhebraeus quotes directly from Pseudo-Dionysius, in his teaching on the divine cloud (*arpelā*) that represents all that is unknown of God: 'The divine cloud is the inaccessible light, wherein God is said to abide.'<sup>526</sup> Barhebraeus explains this teaching in the following manner: there is the 'necessary and natural knowledge' of God, which is alike with other kinds of necessary knowledge and then there is 'all that is unknown to us', which is hidden

---

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid., 104, 492-3\*.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 48, 566\*.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 49-50, 567-68\*.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 49, 567\*.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 97, 487\*.

from man because of its deep darkness or 'on account of its being too manifest'.<sup>527</sup> Surprisingly Barhebraeus cites the latter cause as hindering mankind from knowing God; the Dionysian image of the divine cloud of inaccessible light, provides the example. The cloud therefore does not serve for Barhebraeus as a motif for the hiddenness of God, but quite the opposite. God is too manifest to be perceived by the 'psychic eye' of man, who is blinded by the 'essential light', which thus conceals God in light, from the eye 'which is accustomed to matter'.<sup>528</sup>

The cloud of divine darkness is the divine dwelling place of God, but the Spirit desires to have another dwelling place, which is the heart of the inner person. The dove calls to all who will listen to her, and all those who answer her call are made sick from love and affection (*hubbā and reḥmtā*).<sup>529</sup> The dove makes her nest in the heart, and illuminates this dwelling place to transform the heart into a 'tabernacle' or *miškan* of the divine presence.<sup>530</sup> Barhebraeus also describes 'the cause of all causes' as the dove who is 'life', and who comes to abide in her 'nest' of the purified heart. Indeed it is in showing her mysteries to the mind, that the mind is enabled to acquire the 'essential wisdom' of the Word.<sup>531</sup> The way of revelations, is to receive the gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit who is Life and gives life. Barhebraeus states that 'Life however reveals itself in the living as long as it lives.'<sup>532</sup> Of central importance in Barhebraeus' mysticism is this notion of the life-giving nature of the Spirit who thus gives life to the world through its gift of love to mankind.

---

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 97, 486\*.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 98, 487\*.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 4, 523\*.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 74, 593\*, Sentence 74.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 48-9, 566\*.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 67, 585\*, Sentence 31. 'Now the word, being hidden in the rational, is revealed as it were by being born from a womb. Life however reveals itself in the living as long as it lives.'

# The Divine Name of the Good

## The Vision of the Divine Beauty

Barhebraeus' connection of perfection with beauty is a Neoplatonic theme that he inherited through the Syrian spiritual tradition. In his outline of the third and fourth causes of the love of God, man loves God as the highest exemplar of perfection in terms of both the inward and outward beauty of God. Thus beauty has become the measure of perfection that connects God and man, through the love of the Beautiful and the Good. In so doing, Barhebraeus allows for the possibility of the vision of God in this life, all the while looking forward to the beholding of the divine Face. The Neoplatonic identification of beauty with the good, as the *kalos agathon*, the 'beautiful good', is reflected in East Syrian mysticism as the highest name for God.<sup>533</sup> This notion recurs throughout Barhebraeus' mysticism, in which the love of God seems to be bound inextricably to the divine names of Beauty, the Beautiful and the Good. Barhebraeus places this theme of the divine beauty within his list of the five causes of loving God, and thus the vision of God in the form of outward beauty, increases the love of the pure saints for God. Such a person will 'reject all race and family and become a stranger to all other love, that, on swift wings, he may fly to reach the love of the amazing beauty'.<sup>534</sup> As Teule has noted, it is in this section also, that Barhebraeus uses the name of 'the Good' or *tābā*, and connects this divine name to beauty.<sup>535</sup> Wensinck's translation brings out this connection thus, 'the Good one will show Himself, when He appears in majesty in such a form that His beauty excels all other beauty'.<sup>536</sup>

In the third section of the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus offers a summarised version of his description of the causes of the love of God in the *Ethikon*. In so doing, he lists the five causes of love in general in man and how these are bought to perfect completion in the love of God, in whom these five causes coincide most completely. Wensinck has shown how the

---

<sup>533</sup> For example, the association of the good with the beautiful in the love of God is present in John Sābā. The translation is given by Colless from the passage numbered XC in his anthology of quotations: 'Thus it is with you, O Good One: you are present with them in ineffable wonderment, in the glorious loveliness of your beauty, in the potency of your nature, in your absolutely supreme knowledge'. Colless, *The Wisdom of the Pearlers: An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism*, 168.

<sup>534</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove: Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 90, 479\*.

<sup>535</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 269.

<sup>536</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove: Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 90, 479\*.

five causes of love, are borrowed by Barhebraeus in the *Ethicon* from al-Ghazālī's book of love in the *Ihyā'*.<sup>537</sup> Teule reinforces this proposition, while highlighting the ways in which Barhebraeus also chose to depart from al-Ghazālī's formula.<sup>538</sup> Since the schema of the five causes of love has no background in the Syrian spiritual tradition, it would seem to have an Islamic provenance.<sup>539</sup>

In Chapter 12 of Book 4 of the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus gives his fullest exposition of the love of God; one that corresponds very closely to al-Ghazālī's book on love, desire and intimacy, which is part of the *Ihyā'*.<sup>540</sup> Teule considers that Barhebraeus moves from the general causes of love in man (and for man), to that of the love of God, in the same manner as al-Ghazālī.<sup>541</sup> The third and fourth causes of the love of God are related to the divine name of 'beauty' (*šūprā*) in Barhebraeus, following al-Ghazālī, though he parts company with him concerning the possibility of the vision of the beauty of God.<sup>542</sup> Teule examines the third cause of love in general, which is that of loving an object for itself and not for the purpose of receiving remuneration, showing how Barhebraeus follows al-Ghazālī's argument that this cause of love is especially the case with the Beautiful and the Good. Knowing the Beautiful is to love beauty for itself, and not in order to satisfy a passion or to draw any profit. Teule argues that the same theme is reprised here by Barhebraeus using the same examples as al-Ghazālī. However, when these authors come to apply this cause of love in general to that of the love of God, their paths seem to separate.<sup>543</sup>

Teule explains that al-Ghazālī distinguished the beauty of the exterior form that is perceived with the eyes from that of the interior form that is perceived with the eyes of the

---

<sup>537</sup> See Wensinck's footnotes to his translation of this section in the *Ethicon*. Ibid., 87-88, 476\*-78\*.

<sup>538</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 264-65.

<sup>539</sup> Barhebraeus' borrowing of the schema of the five causes of love from al-Ghazālī will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

<sup>540</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 264. Teule goes so far as to say that Barhebraeus' chapter has been modelled in such a precise manner on al-Ghazālī's treatise on love, that it is almost a translation into Syriac from the Arabic text of the *Ihyā'*.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>542</sup> On the third cause of outward beauty, see the passage in the *Ethicon*. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 90, 479\*.

<sup>543</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 268.

heart and the light of the intelligence.<sup>544</sup> Therefore for al-Ghazālī, loving God as the highest Good is done with the eyes of the heart and is concerned solely with the inner beauty.<sup>545</sup> Teule argues that Barhebraeus takes up the same distinction between exterior and interior beauty, but allows for the possibility of the vision of this exterior beauty of God. Of course, the incorporeality of God constitutes an obstacle to the vision of his exterior beauty, and is the reason for al-Ghazālī not allowing this type of vision.<sup>546</sup> However Barhebraeus suggests that through the goodness of God - and here God is called *tābā*, or the Good<sup>547</sup> - the saints or holy ones (*qadīšē*) still constrained within the life of the body, may yet be granted a glimpse of the majesty of God. To the pure in heart, 'the Good one will show Himself, when he appears with majesty, in such a form that His beauty excels all other beauty'.<sup>548</sup> This 'vision' (*ḥezwā*) is described through images originating in the book of *Revelation*, such as the myriads of angels who stand before the throne of God, and from the book of *Ezekiel*, with the images of the chariot of Yahweh.<sup>549</sup> Teule has observed that these descriptions can be found also in other Syro-Oriental mystics, and following the beatitudes, that the vision of God is given to those pure in heart.<sup>550</sup>

The notion of the vision of God in His Beauty has a long tradition in Syrian mysticism, in which those who are pure in heart may see God as 'the Good' (*tābā*). John of Dalyatha describes the vision of God in terms of seeing the 'glory' of God, to which Barhebraeus' idea of seeing the 'majesty' of God may offer a correlation. Beulay suggests that John uses this term 'glory' in a deliberately technical sense, which does not allow for the possibility of seeing God in his essential being and protects the divine transcendence.<sup>551</sup> He has pointed to the significance of John Sābā's formulation, that the perfect shall see God in His glory or *šūbhā*, but not in (the Essence of) His Nature or *kyānā*,<sup>552</sup> which allowed for the orthodoxy

---

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> For Teule, this divine title has the meaning, 'he who is good' ('celui qui est bon'). Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 90, 479\*.

<sup>549</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 260.

<sup>550</sup> In this way, so Teule argues, Barhebraeus has been able to 'Christianise' the thought of the Muslim author al-Ghazālī. Ibid., 269.

<sup>551</sup> Robert Beulay, "Des Centuries de Joseph Ḥazzaya Retrouvées?," *Parole de l'Orient* 3, no. 1 (1972): 29-30.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid., 29.

of the mystical vision of God.<sup>553</sup> For John of Dalyatha when the soul beholds the Face of God and reflects in the resplendent rays of His beauty, she (the soul, *napša*, is a feminine noun in Syriac) remains enclosed in 'the abyss of His greatness'.<sup>554</sup> Barhebraeus does not represent the vision of the beautiful as the vision of the essence of God, since vision is of the outward beauty. It is the inward beauty or perfection of God, which causes knowledge of the divine mysteries by the perfect (*gmīrē*), and the adoption of good qualities over the bad.

The fourth cause of love in general, and the love of God in particular, Barhebraeus identifies as 'that of inward beauty'. Once again he follows the definition provided by al-Ghazālī, as Wensinck notes at several points in his translation.<sup>555</sup> In this aspect of 'the beautiful', Barhebraeus affirms that 'the beauty of a thing is its intrinsic perfection when this happens to it by any influence'. Thus the more aspects of perfection a thing acquires, the more beautiful it is perceived to be, *ipso facto* 'If it acquires only partial perfection, its beauty is measured by it'.<sup>556</sup> This is demonstrated in the examples of prophets, apostles, teachers and philosophers. In the corresponding section on the fourth cause of the love of God, Barhebraeus develops what are the causes of this internal perfection in such persons as blessed prophets and apostles. These include their 'knowledge of the divine mysteries', their ability to lead 'the common people' without error, and their adoption of the 'excellent qualities' while rejecting the bad.<sup>557</sup> By extension, since God's perfection exceeds all such human perfections so exponentially, how could it be other than that the Initiated ones should love God more than even their most perfect teachers.<sup>558</sup>

Barhebraeus describes the causes of man's love for God as both 'natural' and 'justified', for God is the benefactor, the Good and the Beautiful *par excellence*. The final cause of the love of God is 'a hidden likeness' that causes man to 'love his Lord who has made him in His

---

<sup>553</sup> Treiger has related the possible implications of the East Syrian controversy surrounding John of Dalyatha's vision of God to al-Ghazālī's notion of Christology. Alexander Treiger, "Al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology" and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources," *Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (2011): 707-13.

<sup>554</sup> From Beulay's French translation of *Homélie sur les visites accordées aux moines, Degré de la perfection*, Vat. Syr. 125, f. 172a, in: Beulay, "Des Centuries de Joseph Ḥazzaya Retrouvées?," 33.

<sup>555</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 87-88.

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, 478\*.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 480\*.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 480\*.

image and after His likeness'.<sup>559</sup> Here, Barhebraeus uses the notion of man's love for the good and the beautiful, as the basis for understanding the love of God being the love of the supreme Good, in whom there is perfect completion of the love known between men. Thus Barhebraeus declares that just as man quite naturally loves his own good as he loves his benefactor, so 'he necessarily loves him who maintains him, namely God in whom we live and move and have our being'.<sup>560</sup> However, love of anything in this world or even the next world (i.e. Paradise), becomes a hindrance to the forgetfulness of self that is required in the seeking after the love of God. Therefore, it is only the perfect (*gmīrē*) who can speak of true unification with God through the love of God.

#### Unification of the Mind with the Good

Barhebraeus makes particular reference in the *Book of the Dove*, to what may be called the Syrian Dionysian tradition, by mentioning both the apostle Paul and his disciples Hierotheos and Dionysius. In Section 3.4 on the unification (*ḥadāyūtā*)<sup>561</sup> of the mind (*hawnā*),<sup>562</sup> Barhebraeus recounts the words of 'the blessed apostle' Paul who became acquainted with the 'mysteries' (*rāzē*) of unification, and recounted the vision in *2Corinthians* 12, of hearing 'unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter'.<sup>563</sup> Barhebraeus then quotes from 'his disciple' Hierotheos, who 'has transmitted to his disciple Dionysios', teachings on the unification of the mind with God. The *Ethicon* makes the reference to Hierotheos following the words of the soul in 'freedom of speech' or *parrhisiā* with God: 'I am in my Father and my Father is in me, and I and the Father are one'; these words are similarly recorded in the *Book of the Dove*. However, in the *Ethicon* Barhebraeus goes no further than this, concluding with the phrase – 'together with other things which (perhaps Master Hierotheos and the like venture to interpret)'.<sup>564</sup> Barhebraeus chooses not to pursue the interpretation of the 'Master Hierotheos' here, though as Colless has pointed

<sup>559</sup> Section 3.5 of the *Book of the Dove*: *ibid.*, 52, 570\*.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 569\*.

<sup>561</sup> Teule, "The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus," 200. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 10.

<sup>562</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, xxxvi. For Barhebraeus, this is 'a knowing faculty susceptible to intelligible matters' that surpasses the senses, (*Ethicon* 3 I 1), the Syriac equivalent to the Greek *nous*.

<sup>563</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius also refers to St Paul's ascension to the third heaven in the *Mystical Theology*, and doubtless Barhebraeus' own reference is in keeping with this tradition.

<sup>564</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 110, 499\*.

out, the citation in the *Dove* from Hierotheos on the unification of the mind with God 'shows what he had in mind in the *Ethikon* passage'.<sup>565</sup> It would seem that his reserve is due to the very different intended audience for the *Ethikon*, as has already been mentioned.

In his article on Barhebraeus' Christian Spiritual Sources, Teule notes this quotation from the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, together with a parallel reference in the *Ethikon*.<sup>566</sup> However, this parallel reference does not contain the passage cited from *Hierotheos* above, as it is in the *Dove*. Indeed the omission of this passage in Chapter 15 of the *Ethikon*, seems to be a deliberate move on the part of Barhebraeus, who does not go beyond the state of 'accomplished love', that is the perfect love of God by the Initiated in the spiritual stage of perfection.<sup>567</sup> Thus in the *Ethikon*, there is no separate section devoted to the unification of the mind, as there is in the *Dove*. This fourth stage is clearly an extension of the threefold development provided in the *Ethikon*, which actually repeats material that comes to the end of the third stage of perfection in the *Ethikon*, concerning the ascent of the mind.<sup>568</sup>

The first part of the quotation from the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* in the *Book of the Dove* is provided here in full from Wensinck's translation:

When the mind becomes united with the Good one, it drops the name of love and affection, for here the lover and the friend become the same person as the Beloved and the Comrade. So it is with all terms denoting dualism, as fathership and sonship, praiser and praised, for at this stage the mind is not praising nor being praised'.<sup>569</sup>

The beginning of the quotation, 'When the mind becomes united with the Good one', picks up the opening line of this section on the unification of the mind with the Good.<sup>570</sup> The point is made emphatically that the mind comes to be unified not just with God, but with

---

<sup>565</sup> Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 171.

<sup>566</sup> Teule, "Christian Spiritual Sources in the Ethikon of Barhebraeus," 346, note 71.

<sup>567</sup> Compare the parallel section in the *Book of the Dove*. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 50, 568\*.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 50, 567\*.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 50, 568\*.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid., 49-50, 567- 68\*.



‘the Good one’. Indeed the divine name of ‘love and affection’ (*ḥubbā and reḥmtā*) is left behind, since it denotes dualism, and similarly the notions of fatherhood and sonship are rejected here, as the mind goes beyond all relational polarities of ‘praiser and praised’, and also of lover and Beloved. The language of partial love between fathers and sons in the way of *reḥmtā*, or love as ‘dilection’, is made redundant in this stage of unification. As can be seen in the quotation above, Wensinck provides various terms to give a series of contrasts: love and affection, the lover and the friend, the Beloved and the Comrade. That these contrasting pairs are synonyms is evident from consulting the Syriac text of Bedjan, since Barhebraeus deploys the derived forms of only two verbal roots, *rḥm* and *ḥbb*. Thus, ‘affection’, ‘friend’ and ‘Comrade’ are all translations of forms deriving from *rḥm*, while love, ‘lover’ and ‘Beloved’ are similarly derived from *ḥbb*.<sup>571</sup> Wensinck’s translation renders the Syriac more freely, which obscures the fact that Barhebraeus refers only to the two types of love, *ḥubbā* and *reḥmtā*; already established in Syrian spirituality following John of Dalyatha.<sup>572</sup> Barhebraeus’ quotation of Hierotheos, demonstrates that the mind ascends above both these notions of love, *ḥubbā* and *reḥmtā*, in its unification with the Good. To what extent Barhebraeus agreed with this teaching, can be implied from the conclusion of the extensive quotation from Hierotheos, that this is ‘as our teacher and guide has taught us’.<sup>573</sup>

### *The Problem of the Unification of Substances*

The ascent of the mind is very much an Evagrian theme, whose theology is considered distinctly Neoplatonic by Beggiani, following in the tradition of Evagrius’s teachers, the theologians Basil of Caesaria and Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>574</sup> Reinink has also argued that Stephen bar Šūdḥailē was very strongly influenced by Evagrius. Yet in his insistence on the ‘conmingling’ (*ḥbīkūtā*) of ‘the nature of everything with God’, Stephen went much further than Evagrius, who always upheld the principle of divine transcendence. For Evagrius, even in his idea of the union of the rational beings with the Unity of God in the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, the distinction between ‘the intellect becoming “God” and God Himself’ was

<sup>571</sup> Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*.

<sup>572</sup> See above for Barhebraeus’ use of this tradition in his Chapter in the *Ethicon*.

<sup>573</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51, 568\*.

<sup>574</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition*, 43.

maintained.<sup>575</sup> Barhebraeus' reference to *1 Corinthians* 15: 28,<sup>576</sup> that the mind returns to the divine being so 'that God may be all in all', suggests that he had moved from the characteristic Evagrian spirituality as it had evolved in the Syrian tradition, towards the more radical implications that Stephen gave to Evagrian theology, in the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*.<sup>577</sup> Beggiani comments that without doubt Evagrius had 'a great impact on the fundamental theory of Christian spirituality and a strong influence on Syriac writers'.<sup>578</sup> This can be seen no less with Barhebraeus, but equally evident is the particular extension of Evagrianism by Stephen. Thus, Barhebraeus ends his extended quotation of 'Hierotheos' in a manner to be expected from its monistic focus:

And as the body has its origin in the elements and returns to them, so the mind, which has its origin in the divine being, returns to it, that God may be all in all.<sup>579</sup>

The notion of the mind having an origin in the divine being is typical of metaphysical schemas following Evagrius and Origen, in which the mind returns to the divine intellect in the ascent to unification. However the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* goes further than these thinkers; this is evident in its notion of the final state beyond unification, which is called 'mixture', when the intellect arrives to a state without any distinction.<sup>580</sup> Syriac scholarship has typically categorised Stephen's system as 'pantheistic',<sup>581</sup> though this would appear to be a misunderstanding of his use of a vocabulary concerning the ultimate unification of the intellect with the divine being. In Stephen's cosmology, everything returns to the One without distinctions, which is clearly monistic in its conclusions.

---

<sup>575</sup> Reinink, "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq," 240. Reinink here paraphrases the conclusions of Guillaumont concerning the influence of Evagrian doctrine on Stephen bar Šūdḥailē. Thus Guillaumont concludes that Stephen 'a donné à l'origénisme évagrien sa forme extrême, le portant au-delà même des limites qu'Évagre s'était imposées'. Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et L'histoire de L'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, 324-25.

<sup>576</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51, 568\*.

<sup>577</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition*, 47. 'The one who took his teachings and especially their Origenistic elements to their most extreme conclusion was Stephen bar Sudaile'.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51, 568\*.

<sup>580</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition*, 106.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid. Beggiani confines Stephen bar Šūdḥailē to an Appendix, whose 'spiritual pantheism' falls outside of Christian tradition, reiterating the conclusions of Guillaumont and Hausherr. Hausherr considers 'le panthéiste syrien' to go beyond all consideration of orthodoxy. Hausherr, "De Doctrina Spiritualis Christianorum Orientalium, Quaestiones et Scripta, I" 198.

Barhebraeus makes reference to the idea of a cosmic return to the One in the writings of the ‘teacher’ (Syr. *malpānā*) Hierotheos, concerning the ascent of the mind to the Good, ‘so the mind, which has its origin in the divine being, returns to it, that God may be all in all’.<sup>582</sup> In his commentary however, he admits to seeing the necessity of editing and re-arranging some of its more questionable contents. In particular, the phrase from Hierotheos that ‘God may be all in all’ seems to echo that of *1Corinthians* 15:28, and Barhebraeus, while he seems to use similar phrasing in the *Book of the Dove*, actively avoids such eschatological references that would be more representative of the monistic cosmology of Stephen bar Šūdhailē. In Sentence 49, Barhebraeus quotes those of spiritual sight, that ‘It is one God, which works all in all’, a reference to *1Corinthians* 12:6.<sup>583</sup> Barhebraeus’ mysticism incorporates the cosmological basis found in Origen and Evagrius, but he seems deliberately to refrain from going as far as the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos* in his exposition. Barhebraeus adopted a more Aristotelian view of cosmology within the *Conversation of Wisdom*, in which the section on metaphysics follows an Avicennan emanationism.<sup>584</sup> However, the *Book of the Dove* critiques a cosmology which equates God with the Necessary Being and the First Cause. Barhebraeus’ conclusions concerning the possibility of unification with God, should be considered in the light of his use of Hierotheos to critique the equation of the intellect with God that would ground ‘God’ metaphysically as the ultimate ‘Being’ of all beings.

In his list of the twelve ‘states’ (*šūhlāpā*) of the perfect, which was borrowed from Joseph Ḥazzāyā,<sup>585</sup> Barhebraeus lists the tenth state of ‘unification’ (*ḥadāyūtā*), declaring that ‘all numbers vanish in it’ and there is ‘no remembrance of what is on the earth nor of future

---

<sup>582</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51, 568\*.

<sup>583</sup> This is Wensinck’s observation. *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>584</sup> Janssens demonstrates diagrammatically how Barhebraeus borrowed the explication of the origin of plurality from the Neoplatonic theory of emanationism in the metaphysics of Avicenna. Janssens, *L’Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 279.

<sup>585</sup> Colless compares in parallel the English translations of the texts of Barhebraeus’ *Ethikon* and Joseph Ḥazzāyā’s “Letter to a Friend on the Workings of Grace”. Colless, “The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus,” 162-63. Teule also explains that *šūhlāpā* is ‘a technical term, known from earlier Syriac texts used to indicate various states of mind, such as outbursts of tears, becoming like fire, unification or joy’. Teule, “The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus,” 199.

things'.<sup>586</sup> Here, the language of unification moves beyond the state of duality, the separation between God as the Creator and his creatures that is characteristic of the second state of 'distinction', when the mind recognises both 'the height of its rank and its being the offspring of God'.<sup>587</sup> It would seem therefore that, as Teule has proposed, Barhebraeus goes no further than 'unification' (*ḥadāyūtā*) and refrains from the term for 'conmingling' (*ḥbīkūtā*) between the mystic and God, as was used by Stephen bar Šūdḥailē.<sup>588</sup> While Barhebraeus avoids the term 'conmingling' (*ḥbīkūtā*), he does not entirely avoid the implications of this concept for the pseudo-Hierotheos particularly as it involves the removal of all distinctions. F.S. Marsh translates the pseudo-Hierotheos' differentiation of *ḥadāyūtā* and *ḥbīkūtā* thus: 'for those who have been united (only) cannot remove all distinction, there remains in them distinct; but in those who find themselves in the state of conmingling, nothing distinct or different is known or seen'.<sup>589</sup> However, elsewhere in the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus does maintain some distinction, in that the divine substance and the human substance remain separated.

It has further been said: Look at the fire which becomes one with the iron in the furnace. The iron alone is not to be recognised there, because it has assumed the likeness of the fire by their union. So you see not two images but one, no discrimination being possible, though the two substances remain separated.<sup>590</sup>

This quotation clearly maintains the separation of 'substance' (*qnomā*)<sup>591</sup> within the unification, despite the fact that no 'discrimination' is possible when the iron takes on the likeness of the fire. The divine and the human are both characterised as substances, albeit of different kinds. Colless has shown that Barhebraeus is quoting anonymously from John

---

<sup>586</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 57, 575\*.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 574\*.

<sup>588</sup> Teule, "The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus," 200.

<sup>589</sup> Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 124, 12\* ; Teule, "The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus," 200.

<sup>590</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 116, 506\*.

<sup>591</sup> In West and East Syrian theology, *qnomā* is the Syriac equivalent to the Greek *hypostasis*. R. Payne Smith and Jessie Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 510.

of Dalyatha here,<sup>592</sup> and thus in the end, Barhebraeus has preferred the formulations of this eighth century East Syrian mystic to that of the pseudo-Hierotheos. For Barhebraeus, the equation of substance that is implied in *Hierotheos* reduces God to the being of things, when in fact God transcends substance, and the conmingling of substances is analogical.

### *The Denigration of Love in the Hierotheos*

Stephen bar Šūdhailē objects to the distinction between the divine and human substances, because of its implications for his monistic view of eschatology. The striking passage that Barhebraeus quotes on the loss of all distinctions corresponds to the following section in the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*:

Those minds, therefore, that have been accounted worthy of perfection no longer have either affection or love; for they leave behind them every name that is used as distinct and indicating something, and now become nameless above name, and speechless above speech.<sup>593</sup>

Beggiani makes further comment on this section in the *Holy Hierotheos*, namely that in the ascent of the intellect in 'contemplation' or *theōria*, the intellect necessarily 'moves beyond love' in its perfect state, in that love 'still supposes a distinction between the subject who loves and the object loved'.<sup>594</sup> Thus in the *Holy Hierotheos*, love is described as 'a sign of distinction', which is established 'by the lover and by that which he loves' and so the very name of love requires of necessity 'a certain distinction of two'.<sup>595</sup> Such a denigration of the primacy of love is part of the monistic eschatology in the *Holy Hierotheos*, which views the eventual reconciliation of everything in the cosmos into One without any differentiation, 'For One neither names nor is named.'<sup>596</sup> The description of eschatological unification from the *Holy Hierotheos* has been translated by Reinink thus:

---

<sup>592</sup> Colless claims that the quotation of the passage on the iron in the furnace is inspired directly from John Sābā's *Sermo* 26, along with six other anonymous sayings listed in the final section of Chapter 15 which have been borrowed by Barhebraeus from John Sābā. Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 172.

<sup>593</sup> This passage is translated by Georg Widengren. Widengren, "Researches in Syrian Mysticism: Mystical Experiences and Spiritual Exercises," 194-95.

<sup>594</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition*, 105.

<sup>595</sup> Widengren, "Researches in Syrian Mysticism: Mystical Experiences and Spiritual Exercises," 194-95.

<sup>596</sup> Reinink, "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq," 241. Reinink's translation of *Hierotheos* is from Marsh's edition of the Syriac text. Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with*

For the orders above will pass away and the distinctions beneath will be brought to an end, and everything will be One. For even God will pass away and Christ will be brought to an end and the Spirit will no longer be called the Spirit. For names will pass away and not the Essence.<sup>597</sup>

From passages such as these, it is not surprising that the ideas and writings ascribed to Stephen bar Šūdhailē were considered heretical. What is more intriguing is that there appears to have been rival traditions concerning the orthodoxy of the *Holy Hierotheos*, and that Barhebraeus was converted to the position of Theodosius (over that of Cyriacus), as to its orthodoxy. If Barhebraeus did indeed change his opinion of the book on reading the text itself, then it seems it was the content of the *Holy Hierotheos* that proved so persuasive to him. Barhebraeus only makes explicit reference to the book once in the *Ethicon* and once in the *Dove*, but both seem to refer to the same teachings on the unification with God offered by the *Holy Hierotheos*. However, that Barhebraeus chose to quote Hierotheos as an authority on ideas that had proved so controversial, would suggest that they had come to occupy a place of some significance in Barhebraeus' own understanding of the love of God.

The discussion of love in the *Holy Hierotheos* is so significant for Barhebraeus, because it suggests that the nomination of love, indeed the very notion of the love of God imposes a limit on the ascension of the mind to the One. For Stephen this was a limit that must necessarily be overcome in the progress to unification with God. This can be seen in Stephen's statement on the conditionality of all nomination of the One: 'For names will pass away and not the Essence.'<sup>598</sup> While both Stephen bar Šūdhailē and Pseudo-Dionysius show the influence of the Neoplatonic understanding of 'the One', this manifests itself in divergent cosmologies, particularly in regards to the role of love.<sup>599</sup> Vladimir Lossky compares the Dionysian corpus with the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus; for both the realm of beings must be left behind, but for Dionysius 'God is not unity, but the cause of

---

*Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 120-21\*.

<sup>597</sup> Reinink, "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq," 241.

<sup>598</sup> Reinink indicates that the Greek loan-word *ousia* is used in the Syriac for 'essence'. Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Arthur compares the considerable differences between the Dionysian hierarchies and the system of Stephen bar Šūdhailē. Arthur, "A Sixth-Century Origenist: Stephen Bar Sudaile and His Relationship with Pseudo-Dionysius," 371.

unity, just as He is the cause of multiplicity'.<sup>600</sup> In Pseudo-Dionysius, creation is an ecstatic outpouring of the Good, to which all beings strive to return, as the source of their existence. Beggiani describes the Dionysian universe of dynamic *eros*, in which 'the universal circulation of being, from the Good and toward the Good is a circulation of divine love'.<sup>601</sup> Marsh has pointed out that in the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus love is glorified as *eros*, following the thought of the Athenian philosopher Proclus, while this notion is entirely disparaged by Stephen bar Šūdhailē.<sup>602</sup> In Stephen's monistic understanding, nothing can exist in the final end but the unified essence, the *ousia*, and thus love becomes as a hindrance to the unification of everything, even Son, Spirit and God, into the One. There can only be the essence and existence of the One, since all other existence is in a sense borrowed from the One. For Stephen then, the essence is defined by ontology, the metaphysics of being, while in Pseudo-Dionysius there is a notion of the hyper-essence, which is associated with love. In Pseudo-Dionysius, the ascent through the divine names must be followed by a corresponding negation of the divine names, which is also to ascend higher to reach the hyper-essential God, who is beyond even the affirmation of the divine essence. Here, Pseudo-Dionysius makes the distinction between the revelatory energies (Gr. *dynamis*) of God and the divine *ousia* or *hyperousios*, the 'super-essence'.<sup>603</sup> Barhebraeus does not employ such technical language, nor does he attempt to differentiate between the paths of kataphatic and apophatic theology, but there is a surpassing of making predications about God. Both the Dionysian tradition of mystical theology and the insights of Stephen bar Šūdhailē are acknowledged in Barhebraeus' insistence on the contingency of the divine names. Even the name of the divine 'Beloved', where this signifies an objectifying form of love, must be overcome so that the mind may enter the divine darkness.

Despite the emphasis in Barhebraeus' mysticism on the love of God, it seems significant that he has taken up this notion from the *Holy Hierotheos*, that the objectification of love is discarded in the ascent of the mind. Although Barhebraeus incorporates the critique by the

---

<sup>600</sup> Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 101.

<sup>601</sup> Beggiani, *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality: The Syriac Tradition*, 56.

<sup>602</sup> Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 241.

<sup>603</sup> Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 102.

*Holy Hierotheos* on the love that maintains a state of distinction between the mystic and God, he does not view this kind of love as encompassing the fullness of the love of God - there is a more essential love. For Barhebraeus, the culmination of desire also has, as its precise aim, the defeat of the distinction of subject and object that fuels this state of longing in which the lover desires to possess its beloved. Thus the kind of love which maintains a state of separation in which the lover desires the beloved as an object distinct from himself, is surpassed, so that the Good is no longer objectified as an object of Platonic longing. Instead, the nature of God is revealed in the love of God, and for Barhebraeus, this is best understood in the teaching that God is spirit, not in the Trinitarian title of the Holy Spirit, one person of three, the realm of theological dogma, but that God is essentially spirit and the spirit reveals itself in love. Barhebraeus offers a solution to the problem of rival metaphysical schemas in the ontology of God, a solution that maintains the primacy of God as love, over that of God as the First Being of Aristotle and the Platonic Good beyond being.



## Chapter 5: Barhebraeus in Dialogue with Islamic Tradition

### Introduction

During the course of his intellectual inquiries, Barhebraeus found himself enmeshed in the epistemological impasse latent within the West Syrian tradition. This impasse had its roots in the teachings of Evagrius Ponticus, who came to be so influential for Syrian monasticism, particularly amongst the East Syrians and the mystic tradition from the time of Isaac of Nineveh. The main epistemological problem that Barhebraeus sought to resolve was the question of how to know God, how the mind could conceive of God without compromising the divine transcendence. Evagrius had argued that God must be without form to be transcendent, and that the truly divine must be ineffable and worshipped in the silence of prayer. Following the Aristotelian analysis of the soul, Evagrius understood that the mind always constructs images in its perception of the visible, and thus the thinking about God must work itself free of the image. It was left to a systematic thinker like Barhebraeus, to struggle with the intellectual inheritance of the scholastic reasoning based on the logic on one side, and the emphasis on intuitive knowledge by the Evagrian mystics on the other.

The narrative at the beginning of the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove*, which frames the course of his intellectual development, clearly indicates that Barhebraeus conducted an inquiry into these epistemological conflicts. He studied the writings of the doctors of the church, until in disillusionment he turned to the Greek philosophers, to enquire into every branch of that science, until finally he turned to the writings of the mystics or ‘the Initiated’.<sup>604</sup> The conclusions of his inquiry into the epistemological conflict within the Syrian tradition might therefore be anticipated in his mystical writings, in that he states that he was sustained in his faith by his Lord through being led to read the writings of the

---

<sup>604</sup> This chronological sequence requires some emendations, such as his training in rhetoric and medicine which formed his initial programme of formal study, before he entered the seminary and ordination. In addition, he does not seem to have been entirely ignorant of the mystic tradition until such a late point in his career, and even in his final immersion in the mystics, he never actually forsook the Greek philosophers.

Initiated.<sup>605</sup> The statement of his near-despair of both ‘psychical’ and ‘bodily’ life, is made within the autobiographical narrative of the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove*,<sup>606</sup> and is followed by the *centuria*, the sentences which Barhebraeus says were revealed to him as ‘a flash of lightning’ which illuminated his mind in the midst of his deep uncertainty and doubt.<sup>607</sup> These aphoristic sentences form a particular focus for this chapter as the material from which can be discerned Barhebraeus’ own solution to the epistemological impasse latent within the Syrian tradition and within which he had found himself.

### The Epistemological Impasse within the Syrian Tradition

For the Syrian Orthodox, the monasteries were centres of both scholastic learning and ascetic theology. However, in the centres of Greek learning such as the East Syrian school of Nisibis and the West Syrian monastery of Qennešre, it was Aristotle’s *Organon* that formed the focus of studies as an instrument of reasoning for intellectual inquiry, including theology and biblical exegesis.<sup>608</sup> On the other hand, the solitaries embraced the ascetic theology of Evagrius, who had synthesised the Neoplatonic tradition of *theōria* or contemplation, with that of the Desert Fathers.<sup>609</sup> Indeed Platonic thinkers such as Plotinus and Porphyry had proved particularly instructive to the Syrians in their theology of the supernatural. Evagrius’ theology drew on the Neoplatonic tradition through Plotinus, to express his understanding of the engagement of the *nous* in the three hierarchical stages of spiritual progress, which culminate in *theologikē*, being the vision of the Holy Trinity.<sup>610</sup> On the other side, Jacob of Edessa in the *Encheiridion*, attempted to reformulate the terminology of West Syrian Christology using the vocabulary of Aristotelian metaphysics

<sup>605</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61, 578\*.

<sup>606</sup> This statement is considered further in the section, The Centrality of Aristotelian Logic, of Chapter 3.

<sup>607</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61-62, 579\*.

<sup>608</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 13-14. Becker distinguishes the West Syrian monastic centres from the East Syrian schools, which ‘did not have a strong tradition of “secular” studies but rather incorporated the Greek literature they found more fully into their theological and exegetical system’.

<sup>609</sup> Teule states that the technical vocabulary of the Syriac authors on the spiritual life goes back to the Syriac terminology ‘coined’ in the translation of Evagrius Ponticus into the Greek. Teule, *Ethikon : Mēmra I*, xxxiii.

<sup>610</sup> For the discussion of the Neoplatonic parallels in Evagrian theology, see Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh,” *Zeitschrift Fur Antikes Christentum-Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 2 (2011): 303-06.

based on the highest genus of substance, the *ousia*.<sup>611</sup> Henri Hugonnard-Roche argues that in undertaking the *Encheiridion*, Jacob of Edessa appreciated 'the contrasting points of view of traditional philosophy and of the Doctors of the Church concerning crucial onto-theological issues'; that is, between the Aristotelian tradition of philosophy and the early Church Fathers' synthesis of Platonism with Christian dogma.<sup>612</sup> For the West Syrians it had become acceptable to make use of Aristotle in the realm of natural science, and it is evident from Jacob of Edessa's *Hexaemeron* that the scientific explanations of Aristotle and the Peripatetics might be incorporated into the account of the creation of the natural world.<sup>613</sup> However, Aristotelian physics led to Aristotelian metaphysics, and the kind of onto-theological problems that Jacob of Edessa found himself attempting to resolve. Jacob's approach was to align theology more closely with metaphysics, rather than to question the validity of an onto-theological God delimited by the categories of being. However, this question was one that Barhebraeus was led to pursue many centuries later.

The West Syrian tradition had inherited the Neoplatonic Aristotelianism of Alexandria, and with the focus on the books of Aristotelian logic, the *Organon* was thus read through the prolegomenon of Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which formed an introduction to Aristotle's book of *Categories*.<sup>614</sup> This was a tradition that continued to be transmitted down the centuries.<sup>615</sup> In the twelfth century for example, Dionysius Bar Šalībī composed commentaries on the

---

<sup>611</sup> Henri Hugonnard-Roche, "Jacob of Edessa and the Reception of Aristotle," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008), 221-22. Hugonnard-Roche argues that Jacob of Edessa's development of the theory of substance in the *Encheiridion* constitutes 'a key element in the debate between pagan philosophy and the 'Platonism of the Fathers'.'

<sup>612</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>613</sup> See the article: Marina Wilks, "Jacob of Edessa's Use of Greek Philosophy in His Hexaemeron," in *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, ed. R. B. ter Haar Romeny, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008).

<sup>614</sup> Hugonnard-Roche suggests that the *Isagoge* and the *Categories* were the first parts of the *Organon* translated into Syriac in the sixth century and that they occupied a central place in the Syriac study of Aristotle. He argues for their precedence 'sans doute qu'il y est question de la substance et des attributs, ainsi que l'ordonnement des êtres en genres et espèces, qui commane toute théorie d la predication'. Henri Hugonnard-Roche, "Le Corpus Philosophique Syriaque aux VIe-VIIIe Siècles" (paper presented at the "Late antiquity and Arabic thought : patterns in the constitution of European culture" Strasbourg, March 12-14 2004), 284.

<sup>615</sup> See for example, Takahashi's introductory overview on the Syriac Tradition of Aristotle. Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 109-13.

*Isagoge* of Porphyry and on the *Organon*, completed in 1148, as well as a commentary on Evagrius Ponticus' *Kephalaia Gnostica*;<sup>616</sup> a work which may well also have inspired Barhebraeus' *centuria*. These commentaries illustrate well the very different thinkers that the West Syrians had inherited, and yet both Evagrius and Porphyry belonged to the intellectual world of Neoplatonism at Alexandria.<sup>617</sup> However, the epistemological conflict between the Aristotelian tradition and the Platonism or Neoplatonism of the Fathers of the Church, had surfaced only periodically, as evidenced in the tensions between the East Syrian schools of learning and the monasteries. For Barhebraeus, who had immersed himself in both traditions, the conflicts that emerged in his own writings reflected this epistemological conflict within Syrian theological discourse. However Barhebraeus appreciated that these differences were not irreconcilable, since he understood through his own examination of Greek philosophy that both positions depended fundamentally on the same tradition of philosophy, that is, the Aristotelianism of the Neoplatonic commentators. Thus both Aristotelian and Platonic elements were inherent within these rival approaches to theology, since both the East and West Syrian scholastics and mystics had inherited the Alexandrian tradition of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism. Barhebraeus' understanding of the love of God corrected and completed the metaphysical framework of West Syrian theology, which had its philosophical roots in this Alexandrian tradition. Indeed, the development of Barhebraeus' position might be understood against the backdrop of an opposition amongst some monastic groups to the incorporation of logical reasoning into theology.

---

<sup>616</sup> David G. K. Taylor, "L'importance des Pères de L'église dans L'oeuvre Spéculative de Barhebraeus," *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 80. David Taylor remarks that Dionysius freely used the work of his East Syrian predecessor, Babai the Great, in his commentary on the censored version (S1) of the *Centuria*.

<sup>617</sup> For example, in the *Historia Monachorum* 20.15, Evagrius is recorded as partaking in the disputations with the pagan philosophers at Alexandria, during his time in Egypt. Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers : The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, Cistercian Studies Series (London ; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Mowbray; Cistercian, 1981), 107. This is also included in the Syriac version, in 'The History of the Monks' by Hieronymus in Volume I, Chapter 18 on the History of Evagrius. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers : Being Histories of the Anchorites, Recluses, Monks, Coenobites, and Ascetic Fathers of the Deserts of Egypt between A.D. CCL and A.D. CCCC circiter*, 2 vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907), 373.

## Rival Conceptual Schemas

### The Problem of Conceptual Language for God

In the conflict between the schools of learning and the monasteries amongst the East Syrians, the dominance of the *Organon*, the Aristotelian books of logic, for the study of Scripture in the schools formed a focus for critique from monks like Dadīšō. However, Becker has pointed out, the issue of the study of logic was intrinsically tied up with the understanding of language. The Neoplatonic tradition differentiated between words, concepts and things, that is, '*hai phōnaí, tà noémata and tà prágmata*'.<sup>618</sup> However in the scholastic curricula, the logic of Aristotle's *Categories* was used as a categorisation of the order of being in creation, through scholastic texts such as *The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* (an anonymous text composed at the School of Nisibis, 581-c.610CE).<sup>619</sup> Becker has concluded that in this process 'the logical becomes the ontological', and thus 'how we talk and think about things reflects the actual order of things as it truly is'.<sup>620</sup> When the seventh century East Syrian monks such as Isaac of Nineveh, Dadīšō Qaṭrāyē and Simeon d-Taybūṭēh, voiced their critique of the learning practices in the schools, it is principally Evagrius Ponticus to whom they turned for the theoretical formulation of this critique. Indeed Evagrius' ascetic theology operates precisely from the basis of this Neoplatonic division of word, concept and thing. Since words or language refer to mental concepts which represent the things external to the self, the study of logic through language relates to things in their material existence, but the immaterial and the divine things cannot be objectified in the same manner. For the mind to comprehend the divine, words and concepts could not be used as an objective means of knowledge about God, for these must be transcended in the knowledge of the divine transcendent.

The East Syrian scholastic texts also affirm the unknowability of God in His Essence. God must be a simple, not a composite entity for a composite God would be composed by His parts in the manner of creation. Therefore the uncreated God must be a unity. The *Cause of*

---

<sup>618</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 142.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 142.

*the Foundation of the Schools* follows Neoplatonic commentators such as Ammonius, a third century Greek philosopher from Alexandria, in his commentary on the *Categories*, who argued that since knowledge of a composite entity (Gr. *suntheton*) concerns knowing the whole by its parts, the substance of the gods must be simple (Gr. *haploos*).<sup>621</sup> Becker has suggested that Ammonius' commentary provides the model for the East Syrian scholastic text the *Cause*, when it concludes that since God in His essence cannot be known, the 'investigation of God is limited to how he exists', and this is established as 'eternally existent, infinite spirit, the cause of all'.<sup>622</sup> Becker has further suggested that some terminology of the *Cause* concerning the unknowability of God could derive from the Evagrian corpus, particularly essence (Syr. *'itūtā*) and ineffability. When the *Cause* states that God exists "'ineffably" (*lā metmallānā'īt*)', an adverb which relates to the Syriac cognate 'speech' (*meltā*), then speech cannot reach God.<sup>623</sup> Therefore the Evagrian notion of the ineffability of the divine essence is shared by the *Cause*, but two different trajectories emerge from this assertion. The scholastic approach pursued the investigation of the existence of God through metaphysics as the first cause of being, while Evagrius and the mystics pursue a *noesis* of the divine essence, through the kind of knowledge of God that resists reducibility to what can be spoken or predicated about God. Evagrius was not concerned with pursuing metaphysical investigation into the nature of the being of things, 'of substances which come together to constitute a definition that shows the contents of the being of an object here-below'.<sup>624</sup> Rather he pursued the knowledge of the incorporeal, not the being of an object near at hand, but the Trinity in whom there is only 'oneness-in-being' without the differentiation of the being of beings.<sup>625</sup> In the *Gnostikos* he rejected the attempt to define the divine God, '[f]or definitions belong to created and composite beings'.<sup>626</sup>

---

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., 136-7. Becker quotes from Ammonius, *In Categories* 35.18-36.3: 'Man and things of that sort are composite substances. The substance of the gods is simple substance that is better than the composite'.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 138. Becker quotes *The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools* 334.3-4.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 140-41.

<sup>624</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Skemmata* 18, in: William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," *Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2001): 524.

<sup>625</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *Skemmata* 18, in: ibid.

<sup>626</sup> Guillaumont and Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique, ou, a Celui Qui est Devenu Digne de la Science*, 132. Evagrius' *Gnostikos* 27 is also quoted in: Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," 524, n. 90.

Evagrius of Pontus was fundamentally concerned with the knowledge of the divine essence, the unknowable *'itūtā*, which can only be known through intuition or *noēsis*. This adopted one of the two avenues of investigation into the divine (or 'the gods') as simple substances, which the Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle offered. Becker has described the first way of knowledge 'by a more immediate apprehension or intuition' and the second 'through combined or composite statements made about that entity'.<sup>627</sup> As a scholastic text the *Cause* takes the latter approach, in undertaking the 'synthetic' knowledge of God's existence while acknowledging that God's being is not synthetic.<sup>628</sup> Evagrius' understanding of the necessity of the intuition of the mind to comprehend God incorporates a view of language, which Becker describes as 'the mutual failure of words and images to express accurately realms inaccessible to immediate human contact'.<sup>629</sup> From this stems the Evagrian insistence on silence for the monastic way of life, epitomised by his statement: 'Let the ineffable be worshipped in silence'.<sup>630</sup> Becker has concluded that the Evagrian emphasis on imageless and silent prayer corresponds to Evagrius' view of perception and language, 'Just as images are insufficient for conveying the spiritual realm, so language can not touch upon the divine'.<sup>631</sup>

Barhebraeus also comprehends the problem of the inadequacy of language for the divine, when he questions the scholastic approach that attempts to define the ontology of God according to a foundation of language in the grammar of logic. Barhebraeus declares that the intuition of divine things is when 'the mind hears unspeakable words which no mouth is able to explain'.<sup>632</sup> Barhebraeus also admits to the inevitability of language for the mystic:

---

<sup>627</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 138.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid.

<sup>629</sup> Ibid., 176-77.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., 177. This sentence concludes the Greek fragment (41) of the *Gnosticus* quoted previously, p91, n.364.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid.

<sup>632</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 66, 584\*, Sentence 27.

Above and beneath, before and behind belong to the peculiar qualities of bodily things, not of not-bodily things. But on account of the inevitability of names and the necessity of words, he who speaks must necessarily use these secondary things.<sup>633</sup>

Here Barhebraeus betrays a number of Neoplatonic concerns: that of the necessity of using words and names in the speaking of language, and the relation of words to 'bodily things'. From the context of the preceding sentences, it seems that the only way of overcoming the necessity of language was through illumination, using another very Neoplatonic image of the mind as a lamp.<sup>634</sup> Barhebraeus describes the mind becoming enflamed in the love of God, and this love provides the transformative impulse for the illumination of the mind.<sup>635</sup>

The illumination of the mind is an intuitive form of knowledge, which is not based on reasoning derived from the data of the senses. When Barhebraeus refers to the intellect as *hawnā*, he understands this to be the 'knowing faculty susceptible to intelligible matters'. Like the Evagrian *nous*, this intellectual faculty surpasses the knowledge of the senses.<sup>636</sup> The emphasis of the Syrian mystics on the intellect reflected the Neoplatonic background of Evagrius, who used the term *nous* in Greek to denote the intellect; this term in turn was translated into Syriac by *hawnā*. For Barhebraeus it also has multiple connotations; being translated as mind, intellect, or even heart, as the most spiritual part of the human person. However, Teule has suggested that there is a certain interchange of terms for the concept of the soul in Barhebraeus, which is variously called 'soul' (*napšā*), 'spirit' (*rūḥā*), 'heart' or 'intellect' (*hawnā*). The first chapter of *Mēmṛā* III of the *Ethicon* is devoted to the philosophical discussion of these terms.<sup>637</sup>

---

<sup>633</sup> Ibid., 75, 593\*, Sentence 76.

<sup>634</sup> The image of the lamp as a light to the mind extends from Sentences 74 to 77. Ibid., 74-75, 592-93\*.

<sup>635</sup> Ibid., 74-75, 592-93\*, Sentence 75. 'When the mind that is inflamed with the love of its Lord, is directed under Him as it were by the plummet, its flame will quickly become straight; and being set to flame in a moment it will be enlightened, as an extinguished torch is kindled by one that burns.'

<sup>636</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmṛā I*, xxxvi. This is the definition that Teule provides in his list of technical terms, which he derives from Barhebraeus' definition of *hawna* in the *Ethicon* 3 I 1, in line with the understanding of the Syriac mystics for whom Teule says it meant 'the utmost susceptibility to spiritual things'.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid., xxiii.



### *Evagrianism and Imageless Prayer*

Evagrius Ponticus' theology of prayer, formulated between his Greek philosophical training under the Cappadocian Fathers and the 'Coptic spirituality' of Egyptian monasticism,<sup>638</sup> also came to be formative for the East Syrian mystics, especially Isaac of Nineveh and Dadīšō Qaṭrāyē. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony describes the preparation for pure prayer as an 'iconoclastic' mental process, being a process which is 'characteristic of an epistemological movement from multiplicity to simplicity'.<sup>639</sup> Becker similarly refers to the 'anti-imagism' of Evagrius that is located in an Aristotelian understanding of sense perception, in which the things of this world are perceived according to images constructed in the mind.<sup>640</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony also locates the sources of this understanding in Aristotle and the Stoics, with Evagrius envisaging the *nous* as 'the seat of representation'; this representation or *noēmata* is 'the image evoked by the perception of a sensible object'.<sup>641</sup> Thus the mind had to be purified from this occupation with the perception of material things, in order to enter the state of prayer that is freed from 'all mental representations deriving from the senses or from memory or temperament'.<sup>642</sup> Following Aristotle's teaching on the soul, that 'it is not possible to think without an image',<sup>643</sup> the Evagrian understanding of prayer is an approach to God through the stilling of the thoughts, by preventing the formation of images in the mind which block the approach to the One. In Barhebraeus' chapter on prayer, which forms the first section of the first *Mēmra* of the *Ethicon*, he quotes 'Father Evagrius' directly on the necessity of abandoning all reliance on sense perception and 'thinking', in the concentration of the intellect in prayer:

---

<sup>638</sup> Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," 501.

<sup>639</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 300.

<sup>640</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 176.

<sup>641</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 300.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>643</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 148. Becker quotes Aristotle, *De Anima* 427a18-21.

if the great Moses, when trying to approach the earthly bush, was prevented <from approaching> until he had loosed his sandal from his feet (cf. Ex. 3:5), how could you wish to see Him, who is beyond all sensual apperception and thinking, and speak with Him, without loosing from you every impassioned thought.<sup>644</sup>

Barhebraeus further reflects this emphasis of Evagrian psychology in his description of the mind as a mirror, which is stained by the images of matter, and can only reflect things of a spiritual nature according to its state of cleanness and purification from the material image.<sup>645</sup>

Barhebraeus' references to the 'passions of the flesh', also evokes the Evagrian insistence on the necessity of withdrawing 'from the flesh', that is, from the mental representations which derive 'from the senses or from memory or temperament'.<sup>646</sup> Becker has stated that a sign of the passionless state of *apatheia* is that 'memories and dream images cease to arise during prayer'.<sup>647</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony has described how in the Evagrian system, the mind once freed from sensory perceptions is able to come near to the 'frontiers of prayer', from which *eros* can transport the spiritual mind (*pneumatikos nous*) to 'the noetic realm'.<sup>648</sup> Evagrius also teaches that this state allows the mind to become luminous by the light of the Holy Trinity and is thus able to see the 'place of God'.<sup>649</sup> Barhebraeus' mysticism reproduces these features, particularly through their development in Pseudo-Dionysius,

---

<sup>644</sup> Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmrā I*, 9, 10\*.

<sup>645</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 67-68, 586\*, Sentence 36. '36. As a mirror in itself is devoid of all images and reflexes, but, according to its purity and cleanness images of things outside it appear in it — so the mind is devoid of images, and according to its being purified from the stains of matter, immaterial perceptions are reflected in it.'

<sup>646</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 301. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 66, 584\*, Sentence 24. 'As pure iron, no hindrance presenting itself, is attracted by a magnet, but when a foreign substance adheres to it, the attraction diminishes, so the pure mind is in its entirety attracted by the supreme Essence; but when the passions of the flesh adhere to it, the attraction is impeded'.

<sup>647</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 176.

<sup>648</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 301.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., 301-02. Stewart discusses the significance of Evagrius' notion of seeing the place of God through the internalisation of prayer, inspired by the Septuagint version of *Exodus* 24.10-11, in his key writings on prayer: Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," 195-98.

with reference to the cloud as the divine abode.<sup>650</sup> However, Evagrius does not treat the role of love in the same capacity as other elements of his ascetic theology, so much so that there seems to be lacking an explanation as to the transformative role given to *eros* in his system.<sup>651</sup> Barhebraeus developed the theme of the love of God beyond that envisaged by Evagrius and the Syrian mystics, to bring to conclusion their insistence that the contemplation of God must be conducted free of the images constructed by sense perception.<sup>652</sup> While Barhebraeus was indebted to Evagrian thought in his mysticism,<sup>653</sup> his originality lay in reconciling the Evagrian mystics with the Scholastics.

### Barhebraeus in Epistemological Crisis

Barhebraeus was well aware of the nature of the epistemological impasse in the Syrian tradition, seen by his comment in his autobiographical narrative in the *Book of the Dove*:

During this dubitation I halted between two opinions till some of the rays of the light without quality, in the way of lightning which does not remain, enlightened me and some of the scales which covered my eyes, fell off and they were opened, so that I saw, although partly.<sup>654</sup>

Barhebraeus suggests here that there were two epistemological positions ('two opinions') between which he could not choose and that this state of indecision had precipitated his own crisis of faith. The narration of the course of his intellectual enquiries, in passing from the theology of the Church Fathers to the philosophy of the Greeks and finally to the mysticism of the Initiated, does not immediately clarify what these two positions might be. In fact, the *Book of the Dove* only hints at the true nature of the impasse, which becomes

---

<sup>650</sup> For example: 'as has been taught by the great Dionysius the Areopagite, who says: The divine cloud is the inaccessible light, wherein God is said to abide.' Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 97, 487\*.

<sup>651</sup> Lossky argues that for Orthodox spirituality, St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662CE) transformed the Evagrian emphasis on the intellect into the centrality of love. Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 108-09. 'It is no longer gnosis, as in Evagrius, but rather ἀγάπη which is primary in the doctrine of St. Maximus.'

<sup>652</sup> For example, Barhebraeus quotes from Isaac of Nineveh (though Teule notes that this, along with other quotations from Isaac in this chapter, is found in a treatise on prayer by Simeon d-Taybūtēh), 'And Mār Isaac said: "Pure prayer is not knowledge and words, but emptiness of the intelligence and a quiet, collected intellect, brought to peace by the silence of motions and senses".' Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, 17, 19-20\*.

<sup>653</sup> David Taylor emphasises the profound influence of Evagrius on the *Ethikon*, with more than 63 citations. Taylor, "L'importance des Pères de L'Eglise dans L'oeuvre Spéculative de Barhebraeus," 80.

<sup>654</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61-62, 579\*.

clearer in the one hundred sentences, as that between the epistemology of monastic theology on the one hand and of scholastic theology on the other. The theology of the Syrian Church Fathers was informed by Platonic theory, and with the ascetic theology of Evagrius Ponticus, the epistemology of monastic spirituality became even more Neoplatonic in emphasis. The influence of Evagrius extended beyond that of the ascetic tradition itself; Babai the Great's commentary on Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostica* was concerned to defend Evagrius from charges of Origenism.<sup>655</sup>

Barhebraeus' description of being saved from his intellectual crisis uses highly Neoplatonic metaphors. The very language of illumination - the rays of 'light' (Syr. *nūhrā*)<sup>656</sup> which are like the flashes of 'lightning' (Syr. *barqā*)<sup>657</sup> that give him some partial vision - is founded on a Neoplatonic view of the mind and the highest form of knowledge as intuition (Gr. *noēsis*) of the Platonic forms. This 'light without quality', is also the agent which illuminates the mind when it reaches the state of 'likeness' (Syr. *dāmyūtā*)<sup>658</sup> to God, which is the eighth of the twelve states of the perfect, as listed in the third part of the *Book of the Dove*.<sup>659</sup> This lack of 'quality' would seem to be a deliberate resistance on Barhebraeus' part to allowing the divine light of illumination to be subsumed under definition by substance; for quality is

---

<sup>655</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 182-83. Harmless and Fitzgerald note that Babai also wrote a commentary on the Syriac text of the *Skemmata*, which formed something of a 'supplement' of additional chapters to the *Kephalaia Gnostica*. Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus," 503.

<sup>656</sup> Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 330. Wensinck lists the words for both light and illumination in his Glossary (no. 19). Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 140.

<sup>657</sup> Wensinck supplies this word in his Glossary (no. 3), and provides what he considers to be the Arabic equivalents, which he explains in his Introduction (xciv). *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 137. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 56.

<sup>658</sup> *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 94. Wensinck also lists this word *dāmyūtā* in his Syriac Glossary (no. 8), Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 138.

<sup>659</sup> *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 57, 574\*. 'The eighth is that of likeness, while the mind is illuminated by the light without quality and is changed into its likeness, as the elegant and dense cloud near the sun is transformed into the likeness of the sun.'

one of the ten Aristotelian categories of substance.<sup>660</sup> Therefore this light is without external visible form, being supernatural and not one that can be observed by the senses.<sup>661</sup>

Barhebraeus did not in fact commit himself to the Evagrian position, but continued to maintain certain Aristotelian principles of onto-theology. The Lord God cannot be defined according to the *Categories*, as Barhebraeus demonstrates in his poems, but still God may be affirmed as the first cause of metaphysics. In his philosophical works such as the *Conversation of Wisdom*, Barhebraeus affirmed the onto-theological God as the first cause of creation, and thus God could be affirmed as both the efficient cause (or first cause) and the final cause of being, in the Aristotelian sense.<sup>662</sup> In the sentences of the *Dove*, Barhebraeus similarly accepts the knowledge of the mind to be true when it concludes 'that God is one, and necessarily being and the eternal creator'.<sup>663</sup> Therefore, in the *Dove*, Barhebraeus appears to mediate between two epistemological positions.

In Barhebraeus' mystical texts he proceeds from the enterprise of an encyclopaedist and transmitter of traditions, to resolve in a unique and original way the epistemological impasse that he had encountered during his more encyclopaedic undertakings.<sup>664</sup> His

---

<sup>660</sup> Hugonnard-Roche in his discussion of Jacob of Edessa's translation of the *Categories*, compares Jacob's revision of the Anonymous Syriac translation and in regards to the chapter on quality, the fourth kind includes 'shape and the external form'. Hugonnard-Roche, "Jacob of Edessa and the Reception of Aristotle," 214-15.

<sup>661</sup> The light without quality also formed an essential part of the Hesychast movement, given systematic treatment by St Simeon the New Theologian. In the thirteenth century the theology of divine light was the subject of the Hesychast controversy and defended by St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359CE). Lossky discusses this in his final chapter, see especially: Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 128-32. While Barhebraeus does not make reference to St. Simeon, he does make substantial use of John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi*, an early precursor to Hesychasm. Taylor has found more than 29 references to this work in the *Ethicon*. Taylor, "L'importance des Pères de L'église dans L'oeuvre Spéculative de Barhebraeus," 80.

<sup>662</sup> In the *Conversation of Wisdom* Barhebraeus identifies the 'Necessary Being' of the philosophers with the 'Father' of the theologians, and the 'First Cause' or 'First Intelligence' with the Son (Book IV, 30). Janssens points out that the philosophical system being referred to here is actually that of Avicenna's. Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 11.

<sup>663</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethicon*, 77, 595\*, Sentence 88.

<sup>664</sup> That Barhebraeus was obliged to continue with producing such works during the seven years in which he studied the mystics of the East and West, is also mentioned in this narrative. 'I meditated on these works for seven years, during which I hated other sorts of knowledge, though I had to occupy my thoughts superficially with some of them, not for my own sake, but for the sake of others who wished to profit by me.' *ibid.*, 61, 579\*. Takahashi suggests that this is a reference to the commissions of works in the secular sciences by Rabban

uniqueness comes in the form of borrowing from the Islamic tradition, to incorporate the insights of al-Ghazālī into his reconciliation of Aristotelian scholasticism and Platonic idealism that had divided and frustrated Syrian monasticism from the beginnings of its reception of Greek ideas to Barhebraeus' own time. Al-Ghazālī's insights on the love of God formulated in the *Iḥyā'*, provided Barhebraeus with the conceptual means of finding a third position that brought together the two rival epistemologies within the Syrian tradition in a manner which resolved the deficiencies of each.<sup>665</sup> Through al-Ghazālī's understanding of the love of God, Barhebraeus was able to reconcile the opposition between the scholastic and the mystic traditions, which had arisen amongst the East and West Syrians. While Ibn Sīnā and the Avicennan tradition, as it was developed in Arabic philosophy, were clearly of great importance to Barhebraeus and other West Syrians of the period of revival and re-appropriation of Aristotelian philosophy in Syriac, it was in fact the reading of al-Ghazālī that enabled Barhebraeus to overcome the impasse within the Syrian tradition.<sup>666</sup>

### The Idolatry of the Concept

The postmodern French Catholic thinker, Jean-Luc Marion has explored the problem of thinking about God through the conceptual image. He has drawn on a range of thinkers, in order to develop a diachronic argument concerning the nature of the debate between the scholastic tradition of divine being carried forward by Avicenna and Aquinas, and the counter-tradition of the mystics, represented principally by Pseudo-Dionysius, which is centred on the love of God as the Good.<sup>667</sup> Marion has outlined the problem of Aristotelian

---

Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita (ob. 1289), who worked as a physician at the Ilkhanid Court between 1260 and 1289. Takahashi, "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo," 69-70.

<sup>665</sup> MacIntyre makes a similar argument for the achievements of Thomas Aquinas, whose acquaintance with both Aristotelianism and Augustinianism allowed him to reconcile these two systems of thought. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, New ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 114-16.

<sup>666</sup> Teule concludes his discussion of the influence of al-Ghazālī on Barhebraeus, by saying that while many Syriac authors had turned to Islamic philosophers, historians and grammarians, "The *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove* are examples that Barhebraeus did not only look up to Islam in his theoretical or scientific works, but was also prepared to accept in the person of al-Ghazālī the influence of Islām in his writings of a *spiritual* character." Herman Teule, "Barhebraeus' *Ethicon*, Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā," *Islamocristiana* 18 (1992): 84.

<sup>667</sup> For example, Marion's discussion of the Being or the Good as the first divine name: Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte* [Dieu sans l'être.], Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 73-83.

metaphysics for the theology of divine being, through the image of the idol.<sup>668</sup> The idol that Marion introduces here is the conceptual idol, which he defines in the following way, '[w]hen a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names "God," this concept functions exactly as an idol.'<sup>669</sup> Therefore, the concept, 'when it knows the divine in its hold, and hence names "God," defines it', the process of defining is also a measuring, and thus God is measured according to the dimension of the concept's hold.<sup>670</sup> Marion quotes Gregory of Nyssa for the historical legitimacy of the notion of the conceptual idol:

Every concept [*noēma*], as it is produced according to an apprehension of the imagination in a conception that circumscribes and in an aim that pretends to attain the divine nature, models only an idol of God [*eidōlon theou*], without at all declaring God himself.<sup>671</sup>

Indeed, it can be observed that Marion in constructing his critique of 'onto-theology', that is the metaphysics of divine being as it is received into theology, draws implicitly on the tradition of the Eastern mystics and their own critique of the dominant philosophy of their time: Neoplatonic Aristotelianism. Both Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa came from the region of Pontus in Cappadocia, and their writings betray the influences of Origen and Basil of Caesarea.<sup>672</sup> The Evagrian teachings on imageless prayer that came to be so significant for the Syrian mystics similarly reflects Gregory of Nyssa's objection to the attempt to apprehend God according to the reliance of the mind on the 'imagination' (Gr. *eikasīa*) of the concept. The task challenging these thinkers concerns how to declare 'God himself', i.e. how to express God beyond the conceptual idol, that is how not to fix God in a language that is predicated on the concepts of the imagination, the lowest form of knowledge in the platonic schema which comprehends only images which are but shadows of the true forms.<sup>673</sup>

---

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., 26. 'The idol produces (itself) in actuality (as) that at which vision intentionally aims. It freezes in a figure that which vision intentionally aims at in a glance.'

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>670</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>671</sup> Ibid., n. 4, 203. Marion quotes Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Moysis*, II, par. 166, P.G., 44, 337b.

<sup>672</sup> The background to these figures is discussed further, in my chapter on Barhebraeus and the Love of God in the Syrian tradition. For a summary of Evagrius' biography, see Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," 499-501.

<sup>673</sup> Plato and H. D. P. Lee, *The Republic*, 2nd (revised) ed., Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 507b-11e.

For the scholastics following the Aristotelian tradition, the form of the thing was inseparable from matter, and thus the Platonic hierarchy of knowledge was irrelevant, and perception formed the natural functioning of the mind. Indeed the perception of being was the first thing conceived by the intellect,<sup>674</sup> and according with this principle, God was the highest being that could be conceived by the mind as the first cause of all being. However, the Syrian mystic tradition retained a more Neoplatonic understanding of knowledge, in which the conception of being could not be appropriate to the thinking of the divine as the source or Form (Gr. *idea*) of the Good and thus could not be equated with beings and man's own particular good. The transcendence of the Good is described in these terms by Plato, as 'the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge, but also of their being and their reality; yet it is not itself that reality, but is beyond it, and superior to it in dignity and power'.<sup>675</sup> The Greek tradition of Christian mysticism was indebted to Platonic theory, and the Syrian mystics had similarly incorporated a Neoplatonic epistemology into their thinking about God.

This questioning of the intellect's immediate conception of being in the theology of the infinite is implicit in the notion of the cloud of divine darkness which veils God from human sight. This was a notion developed particularly by Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>676</sup> Barhebraeus' references to the cloud in his mystical writings represent the impenetrability of God to material perception and thus the thinking of being. The cloud recedes from the natural working of the intellect, which is to comprehend being. In the sentences, Barhebraeus asserts that the cloud contains images hidden within it that are

---

<sup>674</sup> Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 80. Here, Marion quotes from Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate* [trans., III, p. 6]: 'being [the *ens*] is what is first conceived by the intellect, as Avicenna says'.

<sup>675</sup> These words of Socrates appear in Plato's *Republic*, 509b, Desmond Lee's 1988 translation (as above), and is quoted in: Stella Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love : Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 31-32.

<sup>676</sup> M. Laird, "Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration (an Epistemological-Ethical Structuring of the Experience of Divine Union in Christian Literature of Late Antiquity)," *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 4 (1999): 592-3. Laird also makes an epistemological comparison here between Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of the divine darkness and Origen's infrequent reference to the notion.



immaterial in nature, and as such cannot be perceived by the senses.<sup>677</sup> Therefore, sensory perception cannot attain to these immaterial images, since the images hidden in the cloud correspond to the Platonic forms of Beauty and the Good. Barhebraeus describes the vision of God in the cloud as that of beholding the Good and Beautiful One.<sup>678</sup> Barhebraeus would seem to affirm a Platonic view of knowledge and thus of God as the Good beyond being, but in fact he mediates between the two epistemological positions in Syrian thinking through his mysticism of the love of God.

## From Epistemology to Ontology

### Love as a Consequence of Sensory and Intellectual Perception

Barhebraeus' treatment of sense perception marks a departure from Evagrius, since the senses play a positive role in the perception of God through the perception of what pertains to the love of God. In this understanding, Barhebraeus draws especially on chapters two, five and nine of al-Ghazālī's 'Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment', *kitāb al-maḥabba wa'l-shawq wa'l-uns wa'l-riḍā*. Near the beginning of chapter two on the 'True Nature and Causes of Love',<sup>679</sup> al-Ghazālī states that:

Since love is a consequence of perception and knowledge, it is necessarily divisible in accord with the way in which the senses themselves and their perceptible objects are divided.<sup>680</sup>

In the second section of the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus reiterates this argument by way of an introduction to the five causes of love, also borrowed from al-Ghazālī's second chapter, and similarly gives examples from each of the five senses.

---

<sup>677</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 64, 582\*, Sentence 14. '14. As the senses are not able to attain immaterial images, so the mind, as long as it has not yet loosened the shoes of the body from its feet is not able to attain the images hidden in the cloud, but only dimly and pervertedly.'

<sup>678</sup> Ibid., 64, 582\*, Sentence 15. '15. The mind in the cloud has unspeakable delight in beholding the Beautiful one. This happens also out of the cloud, but only as to one who hears the [description of the] beauty of the Beautiful one, not as to one who beholds it.'

<sup>679</sup> Chapter headings are taken from Eric Ormsby's translation.

<sup>680</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, trans. Eric L. Ormsby, Islamic Texts Society Al-Ghazali Series (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011), 11.

The object loved is either to be attained with the sense of the eye, as outward beauty; or with the smell, as perfumes; or with the ear, as sweet melodies; or with taste, as delicious food or drink; or with touch as touching soft objects.<sup>681</sup>

Like al-Ghazālī, the rational part of the intellect also has a role alongside sense perception, and is another means of attaining the object loved, ‘as the delight which happens to us by the knowledge of what was unknown to us’.<sup>682</sup> However, Barhebraeus does not repeat here, al-Ghazālī’s assertion that ‘[t]he beauty of concepts perceptible to the intellect is far lovelier than the beauty of forms external to the eye.’<sup>683</sup> When Barhebraeus represents the love of God according to the combined aspects of perception, both sensory and intellectual, he appears to be inspired by the distinction that al-Ghazālī has made between inward sight (*baṣīra*) and outward sight (*baṣar*).<sup>684</sup> In his fifth section that deals with the delight of the knowledge of God, Barhebraeus accepts that the mind constructs images both in its sensory and intellectual knowledge of things,<sup>685</sup> following the Neoplatonic division of knowledge into sense perception and intuition. It is through the objects of ‘sense perception’ (Syr. *regṣā*) that the mind can comprehend the ultimate perfection of these objects in the divine name of the Good. Since God is the source of perfection of the beautiful and the good, the love of God can be understood both in a sensory and in an intellectual manner, as the understanding of love which has been derived through the senses and which pertains to intellectual things that can really be seen clearly in the spiritual world.<sup>686</sup>

In the ninth section of the *Ethicon*’s book of the love of God, Barhebraeus describes the state of longing which necessarily follows love, and in this he follows very closely the outline given in al-Ghazālī’s ninth chapter on longing (*shawq*) for God in the *Iḥyā’*. Barhebraeus begins his section on longing by stating that, ‘It is known that longing necessarily follows love. Everyone, therefore, who loves God, will necessarily desire to see

---

<sup>681</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 87, 476\*.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 12.

<sup>684</sup> Ibid.

<sup>685</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 93, 482\*.

‘Things to be attained are of two kinds, sensual and intellectual.’

<sup>686</sup> Ibid., 93-94, 482-83\*.

Him'.<sup>687</sup> This would seem to refer to al-Ghazālī's statement in the opening sentences of his chapter on longing: 'Know that whoever denies the reality of God's love must deny the reality of longing. Longing is inconceivable except for a beloved.'<sup>688</sup> The state of longing is thus an integral part of the love of God, since it involves the desire to see the beloved, a desire that cannot be presently attained. However, al-Ghazālī also connects longing to perception, in asserting that '[t]he utterly imperceptible cannot be an object of longing.'<sup>689</sup> For man must perceive perfection, either through sight or description, for longing to be conceived, and similarly the person who 'contemplates his beloved and gazes incessantly on him cannot conceive of longing'.<sup>690</sup> Therefore longing is concerned with what is both perceptible and imperceptible, to fall under 'a dual aspect'.<sup>691</sup> The overcoming of Platonic dualism in Barhebraeus' mysticism is thus demonstrated in his understanding, drawn from al-Ghazālī, of the complementary aspect to longing in man's love for God, which is both sensory and intellectual.

#### The Knowledge of God as a Cause of the Love of God

For Barhebraeus, man should learn that there is nothing separating him from the love of God, and that the highest knowledge of God is the love of God. This marks a departure from the Evagrian ordering of knowledge, love and the good. According to Vladimir Lossky, Evagrius identified the good with *gnosis* in the *centuriae*, and the love of the good with the love of true knowledge. For Lossky the Evagrian understanding of love has 'a strong intellectualistic accent', in that the perfect love of *agapē* is 'love of divine gnosis'.<sup>692</sup> He quotes Evagrius' *Centuriae* in this respect: 'Love is the lofty state... of the rational soul by virtue of which it is able to love nothing in this world so much as the knowledge of God'.<sup>693</sup> With Evagrius, the love of God is considered with respect to the knowledge of God, as it

---

<sup>687</sup> Ibid., 99, 487-88\*.

<sup>688</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 88.

<sup>689</sup> Ibid.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Ibid. 'But longing is connected solely with what is perceptible under one aspect and imperceptible under another; it falls under a dual aspect that may be clarified only by example drawn from the realm of visual experience.'

<sup>692</sup> Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 86.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid. Lossky quotes from Wilhelm Frankenberg's Greek selection of text from the *Centuries*, I.86. Wilhelm Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912), 123.

facilitates the ascendancy of the knowledge of God for the gnostic. Therefore, the love of God is apparently given no separate ontological value outside of the primacy of *gnosis*. This emphasis on the knowledge of God is also apparent in Barhebraeus' reference to Evagrius, in his fourth section of the *Ethicon* on the delight of the knowledge of God which is greater than all others. In this section, Barhebraeus quotes Evagrius directly:

As Euagrius the Great says: If among things to be tasted, there is none sweeter than honey and honeycomb and the knowledge of God is much sweeter than these, it is clear that nothing among all things on the earth gives a delight to the soul as the knowledge of God does.<sup>694</sup>

The Syriac word for delight, *hnīy*, 'sweet, fragrant, pleasant, grateful, agreeable',<sup>695</sup> is also faithful to the meaning of Evagrius as expressed here in the metaphor of the sweetness of honey likened to the delight of knowledge (*īda'tā*). The pleasure of the knowledge of God is also found in al-Ghazālī, and this section of the *Ethicon* mirrors that of al-Ghazālī's fourth chapter on the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God, which states that 'knowledge is pleasurable and the most pleasurable knowledge is the knowledge of God'.<sup>696</sup> Barhebraeus is able to deploy these arguments from al-Ghazālī, to distance himself from the reduction of love to the desire for the knowledge of God, and assert instead that the love of God is a consequence of the knowledge of God. In the second chapter of his book of love, al-Ghazālī states that the most essential characteristic of man is love, but that 'man loves only what he knows'.<sup>697</sup> Barhebraeus again follows al-Ghazālī's assertion that love should be conceived as coming after knowledge, and in the *Book of the Dove*, he states that 'because the knowledge of God is the cause of loving Him, and some people know Him not as He is, consequently their love has no foundation'.<sup>698</sup>

---

<sup>694</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 92, 481\*. This second quotation from Evagrius by Barhebraeus is from Sentence 64 of the third chapter (III.64) of the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, the correspondence is already noted by Guillaumont. Guillaumont, *Les Six Centuries des "Képhalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique. Édition Critique de la Version Syriacque Commune et Édition d'une Nouvelle Version Syriacque Intégrale avec une Double Traduction Française*. T.28, 122.

<sup>695</sup> Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 105.

<sup>696</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 46.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid., 10. 'The first matter to be determined is whether love is inconceivable except after knowledge and perception (since man loves only what he knows). A mineral cannot conceivably be characterised by love. Rather, love is the essential characteristic of a living sentient being.'

<sup>698</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 55, 572\*.

While the knowledge of God is the cause of man's love of God, love begins with the soul desiring 'communion with some object which it understands',<sup>699</sup> in which love is a 'communion' (*baytāyūtā*) or familiarity with an object which the mind can comprehend.<sup>700</sup> In this initial stage of *baytāyūtā*, the divine thus remains an object of the mind's understanding. Barhebraeus has derived this definition of love from al-Ghazālī's book of love, Takahashi has highlighted the linguistic connection between the Syriac and Arabic wording; Barhebraeus says that the soul has communion 'with an object that can be grasped (*metdarkānā*,  $\sqrt{drk}$ )', al-Ghazālī takes a different stance 'love is conceived only after knowledge and perception [*idrāk*,  $\sqrt{drk}$ ], since man loves only what he knows'.<sup>701</sup> Teule has argued that Barhebraeus has deliberately chosen the word *baytāyūtā* in preference to *īda'tā*, which would seem to be the more obvious translation for the gnostic's knowledge of God as *ma'rifa*. However, *baytāyūtā* still relates to al-Ghazālī's concept of *uns* or intimacy.<sup>702</sup> For Barhebraeus, the essential importance of *baytāyūtā* lies in the foundation of the love of God in the knowledge of God as the Good. As man grows in this kind of knowledge of God, he comes to delight in his understanding and then to the fullness of the love of God. Indeed the Evagrian-Neoplatonic understanding of knowledge remains fundamental to Barhebraeus' understanding of the knowledge of God. He builds on this foundation with al-Ghazālī's insight that the love of God comes after the understanding of God as the Good. Columba Stewart has defined this kind of Platonic knowledge as 'participation in spiritual realities' and 'contemplative union'.<sup>703</sup> Thus Barhebraeus defines

---

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., 87, 476\*.

<sup>700</sup> Teule discusses the significance of this Syriac word *baytāyūtā* as intimacy or familiarity with God (but 'communion' by Wensinck), a word which derives from the word *baytā* as in 'house' or 'family', and thus implies almost a domesticity, of belonging to the same family. Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 264-68.

<sup>701</sup> Hidemi Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī* (Ohio State University 2011), 9. Takahashi compares the wording of Barhebraeus with al-Ghazālī. The *Ethicon* states that love is 'the inclination of the soul towards communion (*baytāyūtā*) with an object that can be grasped (*metdarkānā*,  $\sqrt{drk}$ )'. Cf. al-Ghazālī: *Iḥyā*, ed. Beirut 1982, IV: 296.15 '... that love is conceived only after knowledge and perception [*idrāk*,  $\sqrt{drk}$ ], since man loves only what he knows'; IV: 296.20 'love is therefore the term for the inclination of nature towards a pleasing object'.

<sup>702</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 266. Teule makes the connection between *baytāyūtā* and al-Ghazālī's notion of *uns*, when the mystic can address himself to God in all assurance.

<sup>703</sup> Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (2011): 270.

the delight of the knowledge of God as the delight 'caused by the knowledge of the mysteries of His wisdom', which is the highest form of delight.<sup>704</sup>

#### The Development of the Evagrian Tradition

Within the monastic context, the phenomenon of love was subject to a radical distinction concerning love for the world and love for God; the two are seen as mutually exclusive.<sup>705</sup> Barhebraeus acknowledges this tradition amongst the monastic ascetics, and quotes freely from their sayings. In the fourth section of the book on the love of God in the *Ethicon*, and immediately following his quotation from Evagrius on the delight of the knowledge of God, Barhebraeus cites an anonymous Initiated concerning the love of God which surpasses any love for the things of this world: 'If anyone's mind has been captivated by the beauty of the lord of the universe, it is impossible that it should be captivated anymore by the love of anything in the world.'<sup>706</sup> The East Syrian mystics thus stipulated that the monk must renounce a love for the things of this world in order to find the love of God, an approach that has its roots in the ascetic tradition, evident in the Neoplatonic theology of Evagrius, and the desert monasticism of the Egyptian Fathers.<sup>707</sup> Stewart shows how Evagrius followed the 'Platonic tripartite anthropology' popular in Late Antiquity, of two irrational parts, desire (*epithumia*) and repulsion (*thumos*), and one rational part (*nous*). All of these three parts might become subject to the evil thoughts (*logismoi*) and the passions (*pathē*).<sup>708</sup> The goal of the practical life (*praktikē*) of ascetic discipline was to manage and transcend the *logismoi* in order to see the '*logoi* of God's self-expression' in creation and finally, to the knowledge of God through 'a contemplative union between the human person and God the Trinity'.<sup>709</sup> The three stages of Evagrius' schema are again apparent, from the

---

<sup>704</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 92, 481\*.

<sup>705</sup> For example, as quoted in the first section in Barhebraeus' book of the love of God - 'John de Dalyata: Those in whom has shone Thy love, puerile, not as in the Initiated, have rejected and cast away family and race and all bodily love, and have alienated themselves from all, in order to run, naked, to attain Thy holy love. And they have turned away their faces from what they possessed, without seeing that which they were going to possess. But what they search, they know not yet. For they are not acquainted with Him they are running to attain. They are still seeking what belongs to Him, without being aware that He will give Himself to them.' *ibid.*, 86, 475\*.

<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.*, 92, 481-82\*.

<sup>707</sup> Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions," 267-69.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

*praktikē* comes the *theōria physikē*, the contemplation of the divine *logoi* in creation, until finally the ascetic ascends to the *theologia* of the Trinity.

These stages are also reflected in the mysticism of Barhebraeus but with some subtle modifications, notably in his shift of emphasis from the exclusive focus on the *nous* to that of its purification and perfection for the sake of the love of God. Barhebraeus describes the love of God as increasing in the soul of man through the practical stages of purification by which he 'is strengthened in his state of abstention' and then further, 'when he meditates upon the wonderful works of the Creator; when his mind beholds the divine power that penetrates the universe'.<sup>710</sup> Thus the natural world provides a means through which man might meditate upon the Creator, in imitation of the *theōria physikē* of Evagrius, then 'seeking and desiring the Good One alone' in the hope of seeing 'something of the rays of the Essence'.<sup>711</sup> The final stage of vision of the Holy Trinity in the Evagrian system is also reflected in Barhebraeus, but it is of the Good rather than the Trinity, with the purpose of this glimpse being to inspire love in the soul for God alone. Evagrius had been heavily influenced by Plotinus' notion of the *nous* leaving behind sense perception in its inward withdrawal to self-knowledge, and also that in this self-knowledge the mind is illuminated by the Good.<sup>712</sup> In Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God, sensory perception is a necessary part of the love of God, which he demonstrates through the Neoplatonic concept of the beautiful Good (*ho kalos agathon*). While the divine name of the Good is used frequently by East Syrian mystics following Evagrius, Barhebraeus develops his own understanding of the love of God through the notion of the Good, which was inspired by al-Ghazālī's five causes of love.

The seventh and eighth century East Syrian mystics, Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha paid considerable attention to the love of God.<sup>713</sup> The writings of both these mystics drew

---

<sup>710</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 53, 571\*.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54, 571\*.

<sup>712</sup> Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh," 304. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony discusses the arguments of Guillaumont and Konstantinovskiy on the comparison between the mystical experience of Evagrius and Plotinus.

<sup>713</sup> For the focus on these authors for Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God, it may be noted that Basil of Caesarea, 'Aba' Evagrius, John of Dalyatha and Isaac of Nineveh are quoted extensively. See for example, the

on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite whose treatment of *eros* was more developed than that of Evagrius, and was inspired by Proclan *eros*.<sup>714</sup> However, while there are many elements of Dionysian metaphysics within East Syrian mysticism, what is not so apparent is Pseudo-Dionysius' innovative understanding of the divine *eros*, in its ecstatic quality of yearning and overflow of the Good. Barhebraeus, for his part, does not make use of the Dionysian understanding of the love of God from the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Proclus. However, he does give considerable emphasis to the notion of God as the Good, and for the Pseudo-Dionysius, the good (*ho agathos*) is the first divine name that precedes even that of being or the *ens*.<sup>715</sup> With Barhebraeus the emphasis is slightly different, man's concern with his own good leads him to the intuitive understanding of the Good, who is present in this world though the love of God.

#### The Conception of God as the Love of God

Barhebraeus' understanding of God as the Good rests on the five causes of love, which he incorporates from al-Ghazālī, since they provide the justification for his understanding of the love of God. He provides the more detailed outline of the five causes of love within his chapter on the love of God in the *Ethicon*. The *Book of the Dove* by comparison, only provides a summarised version of the five causes, in which the five causes of love in man and by extension, the causes of the love of God, are given in the same section.<sup>716</sup> Takahashi has commented that the five causes of love in the *Dove* are the same as that of the *Ethicon*, even if the phrasing is slightly different.<sup>717</sup> The *Ethicon* also follows the structure of al-

---

opening section of Barhebraeus' chapter on the love of God. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 85-86, 474-76\*.

<sup>714</sup> The distinction of the Neoplatonism of Evagrius and of Pseudo-Dionysius is developed in the chapter on the love of God in the Syrian tradition. The association of Evagrius with the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius with Proclus, is also discussed further there.

<sup>715</sup> Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 74.

<sup>716</sup> See the fifth section of the *Book of the Dove*: Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51-52, 569-70\*.

<sup>717</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10. Takahashi lists these five causes of love in the *Book of the Dove* as follows: 'sustenance of the self (*quyyāmā da-qnōmā*), accomplishment of what benefits us, outward beauty, inward beauty, and hidden similarity (*dāmyūtā ksītā*)'. Cf. The causes in the *Ethicon*: '1) perpetuation of being and the existence of the self (*ammīnūt itūtā wa-shkīhūt yātā*); 2) accomplishment of what benefits us (*sā'ōrūt tābtā*); 3) outward beauty (*shuprā barrāyā*); 4) inward beauty (*shuprā gawwāyā*); and 5) hidden affinity and secret similarity (*hyānūtā ksītā w-damyūtā gnīztā*)'.



Ghazālī's book of love much more closely than the *Dove*, in that there is a separate chapter for these two aspects of love. In the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus gives the fullest explanation of why the love of God is 'justified' according to the five causes of love.<sup>718</sup> Since only God possesses all of the five causes, there is in reality no love of anything outside of God. The argument from this section of the *Ethicon* is also taken from al-Ghazālī, who has a chapter devoted to the subject of why God alone deserves love.<sup>719</sup> Indeed al-Ghazālī concludes this chapter by saying that only in God are the five causes 'most fully manifest', and God is 'alone worthy of love in its source and in its perfection'.<sup>720</sup>

For Barhebraeus, the very notion of 'God' is one that must inhere in love, and consequently love is not a description of God's attributes or even essence, but love constitutes its subject - God. In the logical proposition, the predicate of a sentence is an attribute of its subject, and while a proposition consists grammatically of subject-copula-predicate, the copula is unnecessary in the Syriac.<sup>721</sup> However, the construct state allows for the ambiguity of the subjective or objective genitive.<sup>722</sup> The genitive phrase, 'love of God' (*reḥmat 'allāhā*),<sup>723</sup> includes two possibilities, man's love for God and God's love for man, and even for the possibility that these two meanings might come together, in the co-inherence of love.<sup>724</sup>

In Barhebraeus these two grammatical possibilities are both maintained, particularly in his references to the Syrian mystics, until that is, he comes to the explication of the five causes of love, inspired by al-Ghazālī. Here, God ceases to be the object of love, but 'love' in fact is

<sup>718</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 89, 478\*.

<sup>719</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10, n. 36. Takahashi compares the *Ethicon* 4.15.3 to the *Ihyā'* IV.300-307. In Ormsby's translation this corresponds to Chapter Three of the book of love.

<sup>720</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 40-41.

<sup>721</sup> For the logic of love and the speculative proposition following Hegel, see Marion's section on 'Conversions': Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 189-95.

<sup>722</sup> In Syriac the genitive may be expressed in a number of ways, but in the phrase 'love of God' in Barhebraeus' writing, the first noun appears in the construct state, and the second in the emphatic or ordinary state. This understanding of the Syriac genitive relationship is derived from: John F. Healey, *First Studies in Syriac*, University Semitics Study Aids (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1980), 34-35.

<sup>723</sup> See section 5 of the Third Part to the *Book of the Dove*, 'On the Causes of Love'. Bedjan, *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, 569.

<sup>724</sup> Marion returns at several points to the declaration of 1John 4:8 that 'God [is] *agape*', for his argument that God as love transgresses the conditions of possibility encapsulated in the logical proposition. Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 47-48.

used as a descriptive of its subject 'God'. The meaning of the 'love of God' implies that God inheres in love, and equally that love inheres in God. Rather than 'God' being perceived as an object of the mind, the love of God resolves the problem of the objectification of God through knowledge. Barhebraeus maintains that the mind ultimately goes beyond all such thinking that is denoted by dualistic terms, in the mind's unification with the Good one.<sup>725</sup>

The 'love of God' then begins the final part of the iconoclastic process that began with the Evagrian project, i.e. the interrogation of the temptations of the mind. Evagrian theology had profoundly influenced the most well-known expositor of the love of God amongst the East Syrian mystics, Isaac of Nineveh.<sup>726</sup> Isaac would state that the 'Love of God proceeds from conversing with him', and further, in following Evagrius, he states that 'this conversation of prayer comes through stillness, and stillness comes with the stripping away of the self'.<sup>727</sup> However, he did not seek to supply a series of definitions for love or a systematised understanding of the concepts that he uses, in the manner of Evagrius. Instead he suggests that the significance of prayer lies not in the attainment of knowledge of God but the love of God; thus he states that '[t]he purpose of prayer is for us to acquire love of God, for in prayer can be discovered all sorts of reasons for loving God.'<sup>728</sup> The theorisation of these 'reasons' for the love of God into the 'causes' of love would await their formulation in the Syrian tradition by Barhebraeus.

## The Five Causes of Love

### From Love of Self to the Love of God

The interpenetration of human and divine love, for Barhebraeus, is exemplified in the notion of God as the Highest Good, following the precedent set by Pseudo-Dionysius, for

---

<sup>725</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 50, 568\*.

<sup>726</sup> Columba Stewart states, 'The fullest flowering of Evagrius' influence in the Syriac world was in the spiritual writings of Isaac of Nineveh (d. ca. 700), arguably the most profound mystical author of the first millennium, who relies heavily on Evagrius' teaching on both the passions and prayer.' Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions," 272.

<sup>727</sup> From Brock's translation of Isaac of Nineveh's *Discourse LXIII*: Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 250.

<sup>728</sup> *Discourse LXIII*: ibid.

whom the divine name of 'the Good' is asserted as the first of the divine names.<sup>729</sup> When Barhebraeus states at the beginning of his third section on the justification for the causes of the love of God in the *Ethicon*, that those who are not familiar 'with His name', are not able to love God, he seems to allude to this assertion by Pseudo-Dionysius.<sup>730</sup> The causes of the love of God can only be understood through the divine goodness which pervades everything, being the source of all that is good. In keeping with the Syrian mystic tradition following Pseudo-Dionysius, Barhebraeus uses the name of 'the Good' throughout his chapter on love in the *Ethicon*. However, as the section proceeds, it becomes clear that Barhebraeus derives his arguments for justifying the causes of the love of God from al-Ghazālī, rather than Pseudo-Dionysius. This is evidenced particularly in the first two causes of love that establish the foundation of love in God as the ultimate source of all goodness.

Barhebraeus articulates the first cause of love (given in the previous section on the divisions and causes of love), as the 'continuation of being and the maintenance of the self'.<sup>731</sup> Takahashi translates this first cause slightly differently, as 'the perpetuation of being and the existence of the self';<sup>732</sup> a translation which emphasises the first cause of love as the fundamental concern with the self's existent being. This first cause of love for what is necessary to the existence of the self, justifies the love of God as the maintainer of his being, Barhebraeus states: '[t]herefore, if the love of his self is necessary to him, the love of Him, in whose hand his self is, must be even more necessary to him.'<sup>733</sup> His first cause of love follows al-Ghazālī's description very closely, though rather more succinctly, since al-Ghazālī devotes a much more substantial chapter to the justification of the love of God than does

---

<sup>729</sup> C. E. Rolt, *Dionysius the Areopagite : On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* ([Kila], Mont.: Kessinger, 1992), 86. See *Divine Names* Chapter IV.1: 'Now let us consider the name of "Good" which the Sacred Writers apply to the Supra-Divine Godhead in a transcendent manner, calling the Supreme Divine Existence Itself "Goodness" (as it seems to me) in a sense that separates It from the whole creation'.

<sup>730</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 89, 478\*.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, 476\*.

<sup>732</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10, n. 31. Takahashi connects this phrase - Syr. '*ammīnūt itūta wa-shkīhūt yātā*' - with two explanations given by al-Ghazālī in his chapter on love. The shorter one is given here from the *Iḥyā'* (IV. 301.8): "The first reason [why love should be directed towards God] is man's love for himself, his preservation, his perfection and the perpetuation of his existence".

<sup>733</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 89, 478\*.

Barhebraeus. The aforementioned quotation from Barhebraeus' *Ethicon* seems to use as a model the following declaration by al-Ghazālī,

Therefore, if man's love for himself be necessary, then his love for Him through whom, first his coming-to-be, and second, his continuance in his essential being with all his inward and outward traits, his substance and his accidents, occur must also be necessary.<sup>734</sup>

Since the first object that man knows is himself, and the desire to maintain his own being, he is thus essentially characterised by self-love, a love that attains towards the source of his well-being. Thus Barhebraeus states in the *Book of the Dove* that the first inclination of man's love is for the one 'who maintains him', that is the 'God in whom we live and move and have our being'.<sup>735</sup>

The second cause of the love of God is the love of 'doing well'. It extends the first cause in terms of understanding God not only as the maintainer of the self, but as the beneficent source of his good. Therefore, man naturally loves his benefactor, with a love which is founded on God, who reveals Himself in the love that man naturally feels for the one who does him good.<sup>736</sup> When the mind recognises that the perfection of love is found in the love of God, man will come to seek after his own good as it is extended from 'the Good One', the giver of all benefaction.<sup>737</sup> The second cause of love, 'the accomplishment of that which is good or benevolent', brings out the important notion of beneficence (*tābtā*).<sup>738</sup> The Syriac feminine singular *tābtā* has the overall meaning of 'that which is good' and can be translated by a variety of English terms including 'excellence, virtue, goodness, kindness, benevolence, benefit'.<sup>739</sup>

---

<sup>734</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 25.

<sup>735</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 51, 569\*.

<sup>736</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, 477\*.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, 89, 478\*.

<sup>738</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10. Takahashi translates the second cause of love, the 'accomplishment of what benefits us', which he says corresponds directly to al-Ghazālī's second cause, 'the act of benevolence' or *iḥsān* (*Iḥyā'* IV.298.2).

<sup>739</sup> Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 166.

Man's love of his own self has thus developed new positive meaning for Barhebraeus, from that of the Syrian monastic tradition following Evagrius, through his reading of al-Ghazālī's, *ḥyā'*. Evagrius had interpreted the love of the self as the first and foremost of the evil thoughts, the *logismoi*. In chapter 53 of his *Skemmata* ('Reflections'), he states that 'the first thought of all is that of love of self (*philautia*); after this [come] the eight'.<sup>740</sup> These eight thoughts are the *logismoi*, the list which he has already provided in the *Praktikos*, and on which the latter part of the *Skemmata* (40-62) is focused.<sup>741</sup> William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald have suggested that this assertion of 'a ninth "thought" prior to the others', is only found in the *Skemmata*.<sup>742</sup> They see the significance of this notion being in its almost 'Augustinian' emphasis, 'that the selfish love of self is the primordial evil thought, a sort of original sin'.<sup>743</sup> The comparison with the theological tradition of the Latin West is apt, since the Evagrian *logismoi* are known to have translated into the 'Seven Deadly Sins' of the Middle Ages, through Evagrius' disciple John Cassian (ca. 360-435CE) who brought the list to the Latin West.<sup>744</sup> For the Syrian mystics, the theology of prayer theorised by Evagrius, led them to espouse solitude and the discipline of the body and soul in their internal warfare against the 'passions' and the 'evil thoughts'. Indeed it may be conjectured that Evagrius occupied a position for the Syrians similar to that of Augustine in the Latin West, and as such represented the position that was most clearly opposed to the Aristotelianism of the Syrian scholastic theology.<sup>745</sup> From the Evagrian criticism of the love of self as the beginning of the path into the evil thoughts of the *logismoi*, Barhebraeus made an alternative reading of the love of self that was inspired by al-Ghazālī. In this development of the Evagrian tradition, Barhebraeus understood the self to be inherently concerned with the good of its own existence and rather than the soul having an inherently evil inclination. Man's desire for the good of himself may be transformed into a desire for the transcendent Good through the love of God.

---

<sup>740</sup> Harmless and Fitzgerald, "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus," 511.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid., 511.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., 507.

<sup>745</sup> For the problem of the opposition between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism in the Latin West of Aquinas's time, see MacIntyre's Chapter V: Aristotle and/or/against Augustine: Rival traditions of Moral Enquiry. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, 105-26.

### Love of the Good

Barhebraeus relies greatly on the Evagrian tradition of the passions and the evil thoughts in his writing on the practical training of the body and the soul.<sup>746</sup> However, he adapted the Evagrian approach to love in its two main aspects, the love of the self and the love of God, in turning to al-Ghazālī's five causes. Barhebraeus demonstrates through the five causes of love, that the love of God is found in this world by the mere fact of man's existing within it, and his pursuit of the good of his own being. Once the foundation of this love is understood, a foundation which provides the principles which ground the self in the pursuit of the good, then the means of knowing God other than that of seeking the Good, become secondary abstractions. In his incorporation of al-Ghazālī's ideas on the love of God, Barhebraeus unites the predominant emphases of the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions on the notion of the good, that is, the Platonic pursuit of 'the Good beyond being' and the Aristotelian emphasis on the human good (*eudaimonia*).<sup>747</sup>

Barhebraeus shows some familiarity with the philosophy of Plato in his summary of the main doctrines of the Greeks in his Preface to the *Candelabrum*. In this summary, Barhebraeus notes that Plato's theory of the image was the *eidos*, 'which he calls the archetype', that 'in its likeness the different substances were created', and thus he called the *eidos*, 'God'.<sup>748</sup> Heidegger states that for Plato, 'the idea of ideas, the highest idea, is the *idea tou agathou*, the idea of the good', not in the moral sense, but achieving what is appropriate to it, and this highest idea is the archetype which allows Being as *ousia* to unfold as the prototype, and thus the *tou agathou* stands '*epekeina tēs ousias*, beyond

---

<sup>746</sup> For the Evagrian legacy, see for example the ninth section on the evil passions in the second chapter (on the psychic training in the cell) of the *Book of the Dove*. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 32-40, 550\*-58\*. Wensinck emphasises the influence of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* Book III in his Introduction (cxxx-cxxxiii) and also the similarities of Barhebraeus' list to that of John Climacus' *Scala Paradisi* are noted in the footnotes to section nine.

<sup>747</sup> For the identification of Plato's 'Good beyond being' as the 'ineffable One' by the Neo-Platonists, see: Sandford, *The Metaphysics of Love : Gender and Transcendence in Levinas*, 31-32. MacIntyre gives a chapter to his discussion of Aristotle's virtue ethics, but specifically Aristotle's account of the good as *eudaimonia* may be understood as 'the state of doing well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine'. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue : A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985), 148-49.

<sup>748</sup> Quotations from Gottheil's translation, Gottheil, "A Synopsis of Greek Philosophy by Bar Hebraeus," 253-54.

Being'.<sup>749</sup> On the other hand, in the Aristotelian tradition, the concern with the good is moral, and is explored through the ordering of the virtues in the practice of ethics. In Barhebraeus' mysticism, the Good is both beyond being and is revealed in being, and when he refers to the 'unique, essential idea' of God, it may be concluded that this refers to the form of the Good.<sup>750</sup> However, this unique *idea* of the Good is not to be understood as an archetype from which unfolds the prototype of *ousia*. For Barhebraeus, the Good is as present in the phenomenon of love that enflames the heart of man, as it is distant in its transcendence, and in holding together this apparent contradiction his favourite image becomes that of the spiritual dove.<sup>751</sup>

The synthesis of the Good beyond being with the immanent good of man's own being is reflected in Barhebraeus' interest in ethics, to which he devotes two quite different works. The *Ethikon* and the *Ethics*, are connected terminologically, as previously noted, both having been entitled *Ktābā d-ītiqōn*; the differentiation being made in the English translation for the purpose of distinguishing between the two works. Barhebraeus' *Ethics*, draws on both the Syriac and the Islamic traditions of philosophy, and is placed at the beginning of the section devoted to practical philosophy in his multi-volume *Cream of Wisdom*. While this work is essentially modelled on Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Šifā'* (*Book of Healing*), Joosse has shown that for his *Ethics*, Barhebraeus made substantial use of al-Ṭūsī's *Ahlāq-e Nāsirī* (*Nasirean Ethics*). This well-known Persian work is based on the Arabic text of Ibn Miskawaih's *Tahdīb al-aḥlāq* (*Cultivation of Morals*), which shows evidence of the influence of both Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Platonic or Neoplatonic teachings.<sup>752</sup> Joosse states that al-Ṭūsī is concerned with 'the criteria of human

---

<sup>749</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 210-11. This is a further reference to the passage in Plato's *Republic* at 509b.

<sup>750</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 66-67, 585\*, Sentence 29. In this sentence, Barhebraeus discusses the theological doctrine of the Trinity begun in the previous sentence, continuing with this theme in the subsequent sentences. 'What is three in itself possesses a unique essential idea, which is not liable to be divided into many triads; and in this intelligence it is one. And because the unique supreme being possesses essence and word and life, it is three. So it is one in nature and three in hypostases.'

<sup>751</sup> Ibid., 48-49, 566\*-68\*.

<sup>752</sup> Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 1-3.

behaviour' at three levels, the first being at the individual level of ethics, which deals with man's own good in terms of 'Man's relationship to Creation and the Creator'.<sup>753</sup> In the first section of Barhebraeus' book of *Ethics*, he outlines this threefold division in the practical part of knowledge (the *praktikos*) into ethics (*ethiqon*), economy (*oikonomikon*) and politics (*politikon*), 'because man is concerned about the goodness of himself, of his household or of his city'.<sup>754</sup> Ethics thus deals with the first of these categories, i.e. man's concern with his own good. The relationship of the *Ethicon* to Barhebraeus' summary of the Aristotelian books of ethics, concerns the insight that Barhebraeus gained from al-Ghazālī, namely that man's pursuit of the good finds its ultimate attainment in the love of God. Therefore the instruction of the *Ethicon* concerns how man's cultivation of his good in the world should be directed towards the ultimate Good that is God; the terms of this relation between the particular of man's own good and the universal Good is demonstrated through the love of God.

In the book of *Ethics*, Barhebraeus lists the three faculties of man, the animal, the bestial and the rational. With the perfection of the third faculty of the rational soul realised through the discipline of the will, 'man is raised from the perception of the particulars to the knowledge of the universals'.<sup>755</sup> In the following section, man attains to the knowledge of universals, through the cultivation of the Aristotelian ordering of the sciences, beginning with the ethics and culminating in the metaphysics. This progress from the ethics, through the science of logic, the science of mathematics, and natural science, to the metaphysics,<sup>756</sup> indicates the connection between ethics and metaphysics, the notion of the good and the notion of being. It is in the *Ethicon*, that Barhebraeus demonstrates how he understands the two to be inter-related, in a manner that reconciles the transcendent metaphysics of the ideas and forms in the Platonic tradition with the immanent metaphysics of substance or *ousia* in the Aristotelian tradition. In his reading of al-Ghazālī, Barhebraeus found an ontological basis for a conception of God which was not constrained by Aristotelian notions

---

<sup>753</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>755</sup> Section 4.1.3. Ibid., 16\*, 17. In these sections (4.1.2-4.1.4), Joosse notes in his Commentary that Barhebraeus follows al-Ṭūsī's text very closely. Ibid., 64\*, 65.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid., 66\*, 67.



of substance, form and matter, but provided a manner of resolving the epistemological conflict in the Syrian tradition between scholastics and mystics.

#### Love of Inward and Outward Beauty

As Takahashi has pointed out, Barhebraeus' third and fourth causes of love do not actually correspond directly to their treatment in al-Ghazālī.<sup>757</sup> The *Ethicon* categorises the third cause of the love of God as the love of the outward beauty of the beloved object whilst the fourth cause is the love of the inward beauty; in Syriac these are termed the 'outer beauty' (*šūprā barrāyā*) and the 'inner beauty' (*šūprā gawwāyā*).<sup>758</sup> By contrast, al-Ghazālī combines both these aspects into his fourth cause of love for the beauty of the thing, which is 'subdivided into the beauty of outer form, perceived by the physical eye, and into the beauty of inner form, perceived by the eye of the heart and the light of insight'.<sup>759</sup> In al-Ghazālī's schema, these do not represent separate causes of love as in Barhebraeus' usage, but represent two aspects of the fourth cause of love, for the beauty of the thing in itself.<sup>760</sup>

Indeed al-Ghazālī defines the fourth cause as 'the love of every beautiful thing because of its very beauty, not because of any share one might have in it beyond sheer perception'.<sup>761</sup> In the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus explains the fourth cause as the beauty of a thing in its 'intrinsic perfection',<sup>762</sup> while the perfection of God in knowledge and power is so incomparable to that of His creatures, that God is loved more than anything in the world.<sup>763</sup> On the other hand, the third cause for al-Ghazālī is 'when you love a benefactor for his own sake although his benefaction does not extend to you personally'.<sup>764</sup> Takahashi argues that Barhebraeus instead incorporates 'al-Ghazālī's third cause into his definition of outward

---

<sup>757</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10, n. 33. Takahashi shows that al-Ghazālī's third cause is 'the love of a thing for itself' (*Ihyā'* IV: 298.15, "The third cause is that a thing is loved for its own sake and not for the good that is conferred by it after itself.").

<sup>758</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>759</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 30.

<sup>760</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10, n. 33. Takahashi notes that 'al-Ghazālī treats beauty, both inward and outward, as his fourth cause'.

<sup>761</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 30.

<sup>762</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 88, 477\*.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid., 90, 479-80\*.

<sup>764</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 28.

beauty by saying that outward beauty “is loved for its own sake and not for the sake of something (else)”.<sup>765</sup>

In a significant departure from al-Ghazālī, Barhebraeus regards the possibility of applying the third cause of the outward form of beauty to the love of God. In his article “L'amour De Dieu Dans L'oeuvre De Bar 'Ebroyo”, Teule points out that Barhebraeus upholds that it is possible to see the form of God in the vision of His divine beauty.<sup>766</sup> Further the reasons behind Barhebraeus’ insistence on the vision of the outward form of beauty as a cause of the love of God, may lie in the tradition of the beatific vision amongst the East Syrian mystics. Evagrius’ theology of imageless prayer paradoxically allows for the vision of the ‘sapphire-blue light’ of the Trinity, taking its inspiration from the account of Moses seeing ‘the place of God’ in the Septuagint version of *Exodus* 24.10-11.<sup>767</sup> This tradition provided the precedence for Barhebraeus’ elucidation of the importance of the outward manifestation of the divine beauty in the vision of God.

#### The Soul as the Image of God

In the fifth cause of the love of God, man is described as being made in the divine image. The *Ethicon* declares that this cause is due to ‘a hidden consanguinity and a secret likeness between God and mankind’, which is the ‘more intrinsic’ cause of the love of God; for the divine word ‘shows man to have been created in the image of God’.<sup>768</sup> Takahashi has translated the fifth cause of love in the *Ethicon* as ‘hidden affinity and secret similarity (*hyānūtā ksītā w-damyūtā gnīztā*)’.<sup>769</sup> Barhebraeus also refers to this fifth and final cause of the love of God in similar terms in his shorter section on the five causes of love in the

---

<sup>765</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10, n. 33.

<sup>766</sup> Teule, "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo," 268-69. This point has been discussed in some detail in the previous chapter, in the section The Vision of the Divine Beauty.

<sup>767</sup> Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," 195-96.

<sup>768</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 91, 480\*.

<sup>769</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 10. In a footnote (34) he compares Barhebraeus’ fifth cause to al-Ghazālī’s formulation: ‘the secret relationship between lover and beloved’, *Iḥyā*’ IV:300.18.

version contained in the *Book of the Dove*; here the fifth cause is described as that of 'hidden similarity (*dāmyūtā ksītā*)'.<sup>770</sup>

And if a hidden likeness is a cause of love, then that man would be a wretch who did not love his Lord who has made him in His image and after His likeness.<sup>771</sup>

Therefore there is a sense in which the notion of the image can be asserted about God, one justified by Scripture. Al-Ghazālī expresses a reluctance to provide an explanation for the 'hidden affinity', which is 'explicable neither as resemblance of form nor similarity in outward shape'.<sup>772</sup> This affinity involves 'secret precepts' which are not to be written in books, with the exception being the imitation of the divine moral attributes.<sup>773</sup> Barhebraeus does not express the same reluctance to explain this affinity between man and God that causes the love of God, though he maintains its 'secret' and 'hidden' nature.<sup>774</sup>

However, Barhebraeus' emphasis on the Spirit, to which he devotes the *Dove*, corresponds to al-Ghazālī's reference to what should not be written about the affinity, except by allusion to the speech of God in the Qur'an: '*Then when I made him upright and I breathed of My spirit into him*'.<sup>775</sup> For al-Ghazālī, this verse provides the foundation for the affinity between God and man, by virtue of which God made Adam his representative on earth and the angels prostrated before Adam on the divine command.<sup>776</sup> Further, when al-Ghazālī describes the fifth cause in terms of human love between lover and beloved, he specifies the 'spiritual affinity' between the two persons.<sup>777</sup> The spiritual aspect to the affinity between men and that between man and God can thus be understood as having been established and maintained through the Spirit of God.

---

<sup>770</sup> Ibid.

<sup>771</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 91, 480\*.

<sup>772</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 38.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

<sup>774</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 91, 480\*.

<sup>775</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 38. Ormsby lists the references as the *Qur'an*: XV.29; XXXVIII.72.

<sup>776</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>777</sup> Ibid., 21, 38-39.

In the *Dove*, Barhebraeus develops this spiritual affinity of love in his exposition of the love of God. The notion of 'hidden likeness' (*damyūtā ksītā*) to God,<sup>778</sup> is developed specifically in regards to the transformation of the mind by the Spirit. While man has been created in the image of God, this image is like a mirror which has become rusted through his participation in controversies and doubts and requires cleaning, in the purification of the mind from all such distractions.<sup>779</sup> In the process of purification, the perfect mind achieves that of true likeness through illumination by the revelation of the Spirit.<sup>780</sup> Barhebraeus thus explains the illumination of the mind through the revelations of the Spirit which cause man to become like the supernatural beings, for 'while the mind is established in the sight of them, their magnificence and their joy, it becomes like them'.<sup>781</sup> This progressive nature of illumination of the mind through the recognition of the affinity between man and God is Barhebraeus' singular development of al-Ghazālī's fifth cause of love. Al-Ghazālī also has used the cleansing of the mirror as a symbol of the purification of the soul, but does not connect it in the same manner to man's spiritual affinity with God.<sup>782</sup> For Barhebraeus, man is formed in the divine image, which is rusted through its involvement with the world, but

---

<sup>778</sup> The meaning of *damyūtā* is listed in Payne-Smith as 'likeness, resemblance, similarity', with *kesyā* as 'hiding, concealment'. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 94, 221.

<sup>779</sup> See Barhebraeus' reference to the cleansing of the mirror in the book of *Ethics*, and the addition which he makes to his main source text: (1.5.1) '...until the mind arrives at the Abode of the Sublime Being, and all controversies, stumbling-blocks, dissensions and uncertainties are taken away from it and its mirror is cleansed from all stains'. Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 196-97. In his Commentary, Joosse also points out the connection of the passage to the theme of the cleansing of the mirror of the mind, in Sentences 2, 36 and 58 of the *Dove*.

<sup>780</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 57, 574\*. 'The eighth is that of likeness, while the mind is illuminated by the light without quality and is changed into its likeness, as the elegant and dense cloud near the sun is transformed into the likeness of the sun'.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49, 566-67\*. The passage continues: 'And when the dove spreads her wings together with the angels and the souls of the just administering her, the mind accompanies them in their flight and in a moment it reaches with them the cloud of inaccessible light, enters it, is hidden in it and dignified with the state of Moses, being made radiant in stupefaction, by the beauty of the Lord, the Lord of the Universe.'

<sup>782</sup> Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), 264-348. Lazarus-Yafeh devotes a whole chapter (IV) to al-Ghazālī's use of the 'Symbolism of Light' which he considers to be derived from Neoplatonic philosophy, especially the writings of Plotinus. In the section on 'The Parable of the Mirror', Lazarus-Yafeh states that 'Al-Ghazzālī himself brings it in in different contexts, such as in the discussion of the various forms of revelation, the meaning of the religious commandments, the influence of the body on the soul etc. Usually he stresses the ethical-religious meaning of the image: the need to purify the heart by good deeds from the filth of wickedness', p313.

which is cleansed on both practical and theoretical levels.<sup>783</sup> The ascetic disciplines his body in order to remove worldly appetites, i.e. the Evagrian passions, but equally there is the need for theoretical discipline, to remove 'dissensions and uncertainties' from the mind. This model would seem to correspond to Barhebraeus' dislike of disputation and the warnings against the practice of disputation expressed in the *Ethicon*. To ascend to the 'Abode of the Sublime Being', the scholastic methods of reasoning through the *Organon* and the *Categories* must be discarded, since these can only reveal the order of created being, not the transcendent being.

## Metaphysics and the Love of God

### The Problem of Onto-theology in Syriac Scholasticism

With the emergence of scholastic scientific texts in Syriac, Aristotelian logic and metaphysics came to be incorporated into theological discourse; the *Organon* assuming singular importance in the academic curriculum for East and West Syrians.<sup>784</sup> However, Aristotelian metaphysics came to assume a fundamental significance that went beyond that of the Syriac text itself, the study of which hardly compares to the attention given to the *Organon* by the schools from the sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>785</sup> The implications of metaphysical reasoning through logic had far-reaching consequences for the formation of Syriac scholasticism; this philosophy was translated in the Syrian schools and was studied primarily for the purpose of theological reasoning. Heidegger's analysis of the development of Western onto-theology, that is, the scholastic metaphysics of Christian philosophy allows the connection between logic, metaphysics and theology in the development of Syriac scholasticism to be understood more clearly. Heidegger has argued that in Christian

---

<sup>783</sup> This is the context of Section 1.5.1 in the book of *Ethics*, and concerning the first theory of the perfection of the human soul in its Theoretical and Practical Faculties. 'The first (theory): The perfections of the soul are of two (kinds) because its faculties are also two. The perfection of the Theoretical Faculty, as we have said many times is effected through the perception of the knowledge of all existing things to the best of human ability, until the mind arrives at the Abode of the Sublime Being, and all controversies, stumbling-blocks, dissensions and uncertainties are taken away from it and its mirror is cleansed from all stains.'. Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 28\*, 29.

<sup>784</sup> See the final section of Chapter 3: The Conflict in Thinking in Syrian Hermeneutics.

<sup>785</sup> For the importance of the *Organon* over that of the *Physics*, *Ethics* and *Metaphysics* in the Syriac corpus of Aristotle, see especially: Hugonnard-Roche, "Le Corpus Philosophique Syriaque aux VIe-VIIIe Siècles," 282-90.

scholasticism, metaphysics was no longer understood in the purely technical sense as that which goes beyond the physics. Instead its purpose was to locate God as a being above all other beings; hence the metaphysical God denotes 'some being, albeit a higher being, that is at hand among others'.<sup>786</sup> Scholastic metaphysics sought to establish a distinction between the 'suprasensuous' being of God and the order of being perceived by the senses.<sup>787</sup> By contrast, Heidegger propounded that the metaphysics of Aristotle had 'two fundamental orientations of questioning'; the first orientation concerned '*being as such*' in order to ask 'what belongs of a being, insofar as it is a being', while the second concerned '*beings as a whole*, in inquiring back to the supreme and ultimate'.<sup>788</sup> Heidegger showed that the connection of metaphysics and theology implicit in Aristotle was taken over by medieval scholasticism to subsume the first orientation of his metaphysics to the second. Scholastic metaphysics became centred on the specific supra-sensory order of being (and thus divine being) that lies above other beings.<sup>789</sup> This development of Greek metaphysics in Western scholastic theology bears comparison with the transmission of Greek metaphysical thinking into Syriac and the formal study of logic in the schools.

The scholastic thinking which developed with the reception of Greek philosophy into Syriac can be seen in the perception of a need to harmonise the Syriac theological vocabulary with that provided by Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. King has asserted that the West Syrian bishop Jacob of Edessa (640-708CE), was concerned in his handbook of logic the *Encheiridion*, with aligning the 'Syriac philosophical lexicon' more closely 'with its parent Greek' according to the divisions provided by Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, and particularly because these terms were not used consistently within Syrian theology - specifically West Syrian Christology.<sup>790</sup> Henri Hugonnard-Roche argues that Jacob of Edessa based his arguments particularly on the book *Delta* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* which is concerned primarily with

---

<sup>786</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics : World, Finitude, Solitude*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>790</sup> King states that 'in this text of the early eighth century we have apparently the first genuine attempt, albeit a rather indirect one, to make use of Aristotelian logic in Christological discourse'. King, "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?," 75-76.

the definitions of nature (*phusis*) and related terms such as *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Hugonnard-Roche argues further that the scholarship of the *Encheiridion* attests both Jacob of Edessa's philosophical culture and his knowledge of the Aristotelian tradition which 'went well beyond the limits of logic and included metaphysical texts'.<sup>791</sup> This is evident in Jacob's interest in book *Delta* of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle states that the inquiry into existence must begin with *ousia* or substance, since substance is the primary category of being.<sup>792</sup>

The concern with onto-theology by West Syrians such as Jacob of Edessa correlates to the similar appropriation of Aristotelian metaphysics in the East Syrians schools, whereby the conception of God is defined in relation to the definitions of substance provided by the Porphyrian tree, as it appears in scholastic texts like the *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*.<sup>793</sup> Becker has concluded that such a scholastic text in fact '(mis) uses the Tree of Porphyry by inverting it and treating it as an ascending hierarchy of excellence', so that the mind may ascend to knowledge of the Creator 'through the diverse order of creation'.<sup>794</sup> According to Becker, the Tree of Porphyry is used not as, 'a didactic tool for understanding the genus/species relations of Aristotelian logic, which is its original function, but as a dogmatic description of the order of reality, a summary of the great chain of being'.<sup>795</sup> Here the East Syrian scholastics were following the lead of the Greek commentators on Aristotle. Hugonnard-Roche has commented in regard to the *Isagoge*, that even if Porphyry's intention had been to present an introduction to the *Categories* 'altogether free from ontological research', the fact remains 'that the treatise was subsequently considered as the main source of Peripatetic ontology (besides the *Categories*), and that the commentators

---

<sup>791</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, "Jacob of Edessa and the Reception of Aristotle," 220-21.

<sup>792</sup> Heidegger argues that in the Latin West, the main term *ousia* for the 'Being of beings' of Aristotelian metaphysics was rendered *substantia* in the Middle Ages and thus became 'substance'. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 207.

<sup>793</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 142.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid., 148-9. 'This is because the ordered system of Aristotelian logic is not an invention of the mind, but rather reflects the order that God has imposed on creation. According to the Cause, aside from revelation all knowledge of God is synthetic and representational. The mind through the tool of rationality paints an image.'

<sup>795</sup> Ibid., 143.

found therein the decisive formulation of a theory of substance'.<sup>796</sup> The problem with the theorising of substance according to the *Categories* lay in placing God at the head of this Porphyrian tree of substance.<sup>797</sup> By this move, God was made the Being of all being, and theology became onto-theology, that is, the discourse about the being of God. The scholastic concern with developing a comprehensive onto-theology based on Aristotelian metaphysics can be seen with West Syrians like Jacob of Edessa. Barhebraeus inherited the onto-theology of scholastic metaphysics, but by the thirteenth century the situation had become additionally complicated by the Avicennan tradition of onto-theology.<sup>798</sup>

The mapping of the theory of substance onto the order of creation that occurred in scholastic texts may be juxtaposed with the strategies of mystic discourse, which displayed the tendency to resist attribution of the analysis of substance to the divine who transcended the Aristotelian insistence on the inseparability of form with matter.<sup>799</sup> Thus Stephen bar Šūdhailē, the East Syrian mystic, was concerned in the first discourse of the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, with the subject of the 'Universal Essence'. He asserts in parenthesis '[Now it has been called "Universal" because from it all distinctions (of being) were brought into existence;]'.<sup>800</sup> Stephen declares that he himself has received this teaching through the revelation of secrets to the mind by the Universal Essence, 'and by it I too was divinely taught, and mystically informed what is the secret of distinctions'.<sup>801</sup> The *Book of Holy Hierotheos* inhabits a complex cosmology, in which 'God' is not in fact the

---

<sup>796</sup> Hugonnard-Roche, "Jacob of Edessa and the Reception of Aristotle," 219.

<sup>797</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 143.

<sup>798</sup> Nader El-Bizri's article considers the influence of Avicenna on the metaphysical debates of the Latin West, as well as how this influence has meant that modern Western philosophers have tended to view Avicenna through this legacy. N. El-Bizri, "Avicenna and Essentialism," *Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (2001): 273-75.

<sup>799</sup> Barhebraeus makes reference to this theory in the book of *Ethics*, in regards to the perfection of first the Theoretical Faculty and secondly to the Practical Faculty, in 1.5.1: 'Wise men have compared form to the first perfection, and matter to the second (perfection) and they have said: *just as form has no existence without matter and matter has no existence without form*, in the same way knowledge without deeds is useless and deeds without knowledge are ineffectual', (italics are mine). Joosse, *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristotelian Philosophy: Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics: A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries*, 28\*, 29.

<sup>800</sup> Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 6, 5\*.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 5\*.



highest principle, and this is perhaps in deliberate reaction to the definition of ‘God’ as the highest distinction of being in scholastic metaphysics. In this, Stephen follows the Evagrian insistence that the distinctions of form and species could not be abstracted to the insubstantial, the ineffable God. Evagrius’ influence emerges furthermore in Stephen’s works when he refers to language as a secondary thing.<sup>802</sup> This Evagrian approach to language is also evident in Barhebraeus’ mystical writings, and in the *Hierotheos* it is stated:

Yet, so far as it can be done, even I myself am attempting to say in human speech things which are not (to be) reduced to speech, because the Spirit teaches all, and the Spirit judges everything, and the Spirit searches even the depths of God, and we have received the Spirit.<sup>803</sup>

Stephen’s emphasis on the Spirit, as a principle more transcendent even than ‘God’, could form part of the inspiration for Barhebraeus’ own emphasis on the Spirit of God as the dove, and why the notion of the dove is so intrinsic to Barhebraeus’ mysticism. In his introduction to the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus states that the dove gives ‘reason to the rational’, (*meltā l-melīle*).<sup>804</sup> The feminine singular emphatic noun, *meltā* translates variously as ‘word, saying, precept, the Logos’ but also ‘the faculty of speech, thought, reason, energy of the mind’,<sup>805</sup> while the meanings of ‘*melīle*’, the Pe’al masculine plural adjectival participle of the verbal root ML, encompass ‘endowed with speech and reason, articulate, rational’.<sup>806</sup> Becker has shown that *meltā* equates with the Greek *logos*, both of which could refer to terms related to language and rationality.<sup>807</sup> The application of *meltā* in Stephen and in Barhebraeus contains this double referent, pertaining both to ‘speech’

---

<sup>802</sup> This Neoplatonic attitude to language has been discussed in the section, Rival Conceptual Schemas: The Problem of Conceptual Language for God.

<sup>803</sup> Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 7, 6\*.

<sup>804</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 4, 532\*.

<sup>805</sup> Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 274-75.

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>807</sup> Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 133. Henry George Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, 9th ed., 2 vols., vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon), 1057-59. Liddell and Scott lists these primary meanings for *logos*: (I) computation, reckoning; (II) relation, correspondence, proportion; (III) explanation; (IV) inward debate of the soul (i.e. thinking, reasoning, reflection, deliberation); (V) continuous statement, narrative, oration; (VI) verbal expression or utterance; (VII) a particular utterance, saying; (VIII) thing spoken of, subject matter; (IX) expression, utterance, speech; (X) the Word or Wisdom of God.

and to 'reason'. Therefore, the Spirit gives speech to man, and contained implicitly within this endowment is the faculty of reasoning, but the Spirit cannot be reduced to what it gives, *logos* or *meltā*. Stephen's bold assertion that 'the Spirit searches even the depths of God', would seem to refer to the onto-theological God, the God who is understood as contained within being, and thus through the metaphysical reasoning of the Being of being as constituting the divine being. The classification of being through Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, provides a logical mapping of existent being through the primary category of *ousia* or its equivalents. However, such metaphysical reasoning does not inquire into what gives being, nor does it seek to inquire beyond its structures of onto-theological thinking.<sup>808</sup> Similarly, the Evagrian mystics, in their tendency towards Platonic idealism and their suspicion of any kind of representative thinking about the divine, especially that provided by metaphysics, did not enter into this inquiry. Barhebraeus develops his understanding of the Spirit as instrumental to overcoming the limit of the onto-theological thinking of being in regards to the conception of God through his ontology of the gift of the Spirit; the theme of a later section in this chapter.

#### The Necessary Existent and/or the Good

When Barhebraeus reiterates al-Ghazālī's notion that the love of God begins with self-love and the love of continuation of one's being (as the first cause of love), he also follows al-Ghazālī's conclusion, that God is loved as the highest benefactor. According to al-Ghazālī, that God is loved as the Good - the source of all benefaction - depends on the necessity of the divine existence, for the being of God depends on no other cause but Himself, and thus the divine being is the first cause of all being and all that is good. Barhebraeus also seems to draw implicitly on al-Ghazālī's argument that man can ultimately only love God as the transcendent One whose absolute perfection merits love; for only God is the unique and eternal by virtue of the necessity of his own existence.<sup>809</sup> The formulation of the

---

<sup>808</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, "The 'End of Metaphysics' as a Possibility," in *Religion after Metaphysics*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 171-73. Following Heidegger's questioning of onto-theological thinking, Marion argues that 'Metaphysics thinks beings, because it thinks only in the mode of representation; it thus only broaches ontological difference within the horizon of beings and their mode of being.' Marion continues that metaphysicians 'ask what beings are as beings and respond to the question as Aristotle did through the *ousia* or its later figures'.

<sup>809</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 35.

‘Necessarily Existent’ is derived from Avicennan metaphysics, following the argument that since God’s existence is necessary to His essence, God cannot *not* exist, and thus He is a necessary being, the ‘necessary of existence’ (*wājib al-wujūd*), as opposed to ‘possible of existence’ (*mumkin al-wujūd*).<sup>810</sup> In al-Ghazālī’s schema, since God as the necessary existent is the only truly existent being, all other existence (*wujūd*) is borrowed from Him, and thus only God is the perfection of all being.<sup>811</sup> Barhebraeus seems to follow this metaphysical understanding, in his usage of the mirror analogy to demonstrate the ontological difference between those things which ‘have no real essence in themselves’ - that is the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven - and God Himself; for the two kingdoms are merely a reflection of what is their essential ‘cause’ (Syr. ‘*eltā*’).<sup>812</sup>

Barhebraeus appears to make reference to the Avicennan formula of the necessary existent in the *Book of the Dove*, when he states that since man is a potential being, he wants a necessary being, and so it follows that this is God.<sup>813</sup> The term for the divine ‘being’ in the formulation of Sentence 73 is ‘*ītūtā*’.<sup>814</sup> While it has no obvious linguistic connection to the Arabic phrase *al-wājib al-wujūd*, there is a clear conceptual link to Avicenna’s ‘first efficient cause’, which provides the onto-theological principle of the necessary being to which both

---

<sup>810</sup> Alexander Treiger, "Monism and Monotheism in Al-Ghazālī's Mishkāt Al-Anwār," *Journal of Quranic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2007): 8.

<sup>811</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 23-24. The first cause of love ‘necessitates the utmost love for God since whoever knows himself, and knows his Lord, knows absolutely that his own existence does not occur as a result of his own nature but rather, that his existence prolonged and perfected, comes from God and goes to God and is [sustained] by God.’

<sup>812</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 68, 586\*, Sentence 38. Barhebraeus uses the mirror analogy on many different occasions, but particularly in the sentences. Sentence 38 refers to the kingdoms of earth and heaven, quoted here in full: ‘As the reflexes of a mirror have no real essence in themselves, but their essence depends upon the essence of the things reflected, so the two kingdoms – that of corporeal and that of incorporeal things – have no true essence in themselves, but their essence depends upon the first essence, their cause.’

<sup>813</sup> Ibid., 74, 592\*, Sentence 73. The possible reference to the notion of the necessary of existence, *al-wājib al-wujūd*, as suggested by Wensinck (footnote 2), is quoted here from Sentence 73: ‘But the subtle speculation of the sages possesses a different, peculiar knowledge, by which from the being he whose being is necessary is recognized. In the same way, if he that is, is necessarily being, this is what is requisited. If he is a potentially being, he wants a necessarily being; so there is a necessarily being.’

<sup>814</sup> Bedjan, *Ethikon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei*, 592. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 15. Payne-Smith gives *ousia* as the equivalent of ‘*ītūtā*’, with the principle meaning of ‘being, essence, substance’.

Barhebraeus and al-Ghazālī refer.<sup>815</sup> However, Barhebraeus forms an implicit critique of this metaphysical reasoning about God, which proceeds from the potentiality of man's being in order to argue that since man is a potential being it is possible for him not to exist, since this in itself requires that God must be the necessary being that causes potential beings. Therefore, the necessity of God's being is more a requirement of this form of reasoning rather than an axiomatic proof that cannot be refuted. In the sentence which follows, that is, Sentence 74, Barhebraeus sublimates this manner of reasoning about the necessary being of God, to that of the knowledge of the Initiated through illumination. Rather than deciding the nature of God as a necessary being, the object of the mind's reasoning, the Spirit dwells within the heart of man.<sup>816</sup> In this state of divine presence and indwelling, the essential reality of love is thus found in the presence of God. For Barhebraeus, the love of God does not require the proofs from the logic of metaphysics, for love provides its own logic, the logic of self-giving in the revelation of God's love to the heart of man which enflames his mind and body.<sup>817</sup> Since God is essentially Spirit, the Spirit gives all things to creation, including rationality to the mind and life to the soul, by virtue of its nature of giving.<sup>818</sup> The revelation of the Spirit functions to dissolve the metaphysical distinctions of essence and existence in God, who is immediately present in the love of God, and transcendent of the existence of form and matter.

In appropriating the five causes of love and the love of God from al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, Barhebraeus finds a solution to the impasse between the Evagrian monastic tradition and the Aristotelian scholastics. Since man loves primarily himself as a potential being, whose being he wishes to preserve and continue, he necessarily seeks after the cause of his being

---

<sup>815</sup> Treiger argues that al-Ghazālī's 'monistic ontology' follows Avicenna's argument about the chain of efficient causes very closely, with only some modifications. Treiger, "Monism and Monotheism in Al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt Al-Anwār*," 8. In the *Conversation of Wisdom*, Barhebraeus' summary of Avicennan theoretical philosophy, the third chapter of the *Metaphysics* is concerned with the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being through Essence – see Janssens' edition of the text. Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 100\*, 297.

<sup>816</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 74, 592\*, Sentence 74.

<sup>817</sup> For example, Sentences 80-2 recount the experience of an Initiated as the lover whose entire being burns with the love of his Beloved Lord. Ibid., 75-76, 593-94\*.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 4, 523\*. In his Introduction to the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus says of the dove: 'She even gives reason to the rational and life to the living.'

in the necessary or first being, and in the manner of scholastic theology.<sup>819</sup> However, this manner of reasoning cannot discern what is behind this first cause, for ‘the cause of all causes’ is not delimited by being but is the Spirit that gives life.<sup>820</sup> The Spirit is so named because ‘she’ is both outside of and yet sustains material existence, without occupying a position that can be identified within a classification of being. Barhebraeus offers the image of the dove that dwells in ‘her place’ in heaven and yet reaches ‘all quarters’ of the earth.<sup>821</sup> Barhebraeus does not discount the inquiry into God as the ‘Cause of all’ as inappropriate for thinking about the essential God,<sup>822</sup> but maintains that from metaphysics one must progress into a further stage, of what gives being. The giving of being is through the cause (Syr. ‘*eltā*; Gr. *aitia*)<sup>823</sup> of all, in which Barhebraeus follows the tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius that the causation of all things is a ‘function’ and not a ‘category’ of God.<sup>824</sup> For Barhebraeus, being is given through the working of the spiritual dove to extend the divine goodness to all things. The divine Good is thus not dependent on being, nor is it beyond being, but gives itself without restriction as the foundation of being through the love of God.

#### The Ontological Love of the Avicennan Tradition

In his exposition of the love of God, al-Ghazālī constantly draws on examples of human love. Since the love of God is present in existence, this love can only be sought through an understanding of the ‘subsistence’ of the self in God. Al-Ghazālī asks, ‘How can a man love himself and not love his Lord through whom his very subsistence occurs?’<sup>825</sup> In his metaphysical understanding of the cosmos, all beings subsist through God, who is the principle of all existence.

---

<sup>819</sup> This development of self-love to love for the necessary being may be inferred from Sentence 73 and the following sentences. Ibid., 74-75, 592\*.

<sup>820</sup> Ibid., 48. 566\*.

<sup>821</sup> Ibid., 4, 523\*. The quotation given above from the Introduction continues thus: ‘She flies without leaving her nest above, the church of the firstborn in heaven. She reaches all quarters without stirring from her place.’

<sup>822</sup> Becker notes that the Syriac phrase ‘Cause of all’ was a ‘common appellation of God’ in the scholastic cause genre from the mid-sixth century, eg. the *Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 104.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid. Becker suggests a Greek philosophical background to the cause genre that may be seen in the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle.

<sup>824</sup> Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 75.

<sup>825</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 24.

In sum, nothing in existence possesses within itself the principle of its own existence except for the Self-Subsistent One Himself (*al-Qayyūm*), the Living One (*al-Hayy*) who subsists through His own essence while everything but Him subsists through Him.<sup>826</sup>

For al-Ghazālī, God loves himself since nothing is outside of His Essence, and all other being is borrowed from His being; God is the only truly Existent Being.<sup>827</sup> In his introduction to al-Ghazālī's book of love, Eric Ormsby comments that he is highly dependent on Ibn Sīnā's notion expressed in the *Shifā'*, that God is 'the lover of His own essence'.<sup>828</sup> Furthermore, Ormsby suggests that al-Ghazālī's insistence on God 'as the only true beloved, beyond all appearances, rests in part on Ibn Sīnā's characterisation of God as the "first good that is loved" (*al-khayr al-ma'shūq al-awwal*)'.<sup>829</sup> In his tenth chapter on 'the Meaning of God's Love for Man', al-Ghazālī does indeed affirm that since nothing exists apart from the divine essence and acts, then God only loves Himself. For God, in loving only his own essence and actions, 'does not pass beyond his own essence in his love nor the consequences issuing from his essence, inasmuch as they stand in a nexus with his essence'.<sup>830</sup> Barhebraeus does not express these views in either the *Dove* or the *Ethicon*. Whilst the latter work closely follows the structure of al-Ghazālī's book of love, there is no parallel to this tenth chapter of al-Ghazālī, which would suggest that Barhebraeus deliberately omitted to include it in his own work. Instead, he makes al-Ghazālī's eleventh chapter the subject of his tenth section, the distinctive marks of man's love for God. As previously argued, despite his inclusion of metaphysics within his other works drawing on Avicennan philosophy, Barhebraeus takes a more critical stance towards Avicennan metaphysics in regards to its onto-theological implications, than does al-Ghazālī. The purpose of the *Ethicon* and the *Book of the Dove* is not to disparage this kind of philosophy entirely, but to mediate between the onto-theological conception of God and the typically anti-scholastic stance of the mystics.

Al-Ghazālī critiqued Ibn Sīnā, but was also heavily reliant on this tradition of Aristotelian philosophy, as can be seen even in his later works that are subsequent to his account in *al-*

---

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> Ibid., 85. 'Existence belongs only to the One, the True, by Whom all actions come to be'.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid., xxxvi.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., 101-2.

*Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*The Deliverer from Error*)<sup>831</sup> of his supposed rejection of Peripatetic philosophy.<sup>832</sup> His understanding of the love of God was very much influenced by the insights that he gained through his inquiry into Avicennan metaphysics, which he had summarised in the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*), his work of philosophy based on Ibn Sīnā's *Dānishnāma-yi 'Alā'ī* (*The Book of Knowledge for 'Alā' al-Dawlah*).<sup>833</sup> Even in his subsequent refutation of philosophy, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Precipitance of the Philosophers*), when al-Ghazālī summarises the notion of God as 'the ultimate beloved' in the tradition of the *falāsifa*, Ormsby has proposed that this is 'with apparent approval' rather than condemnation.<sup>834</sup>

### The Ontology of the Gift of Love

The metaphysical understanding of God as the necessary existent in al-Ghazālī provides the basis for his ontology of the love of God as a gift through the divine goodness. When he extrapolates the five causes of love, al-Ghazālī begins with self-love, i.e. the love for the continuation of one's own being, in order to explain the love of benefaction and the benefactor, which finds its ultimate completion in God as the perfect benefactor, who gives being to man without any consideration other than the giving for the sake of itself. The gift model for the love of God can thus be extrapolated from the first three causes of love:

- love for oneself
- love for one's own benefactor
- love for the benefactor for his own sake (i.e. for the sake of benefaction in itself and not any personal benefaction that might be immediately derived).

---

<sup>831</sup> *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error : An Annotated Translation of Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal*, trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000).

<sup>832</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 20. For the influence of Avicennan philosophy even in his later works, see Alexander Treiger's introduction to the recent scholarship on this issue: Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought : Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-4. Treiger's translation of the titles of al-Ghazālī's works has been preferred in the thesis, though in general these works have been cited in the Arabic.

<sup>833</sup> Takahashi, "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus," 12.

<sup>834</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, xix. In Marmura's edition, this occurs in Discussion 5 (34-35). *The Incoherence of the Philosophers = Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura, Islamic Translation Series (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 94-95.

With the first cause of love, the gnostic begins with the love of himself, and then in recognition of the bestowal of his existence by God, 'he perforce loves Him who accorded existence to him'.<sup>835</sup> According to the second cause of love, it is natural to feel love for one's benefactor; however 'a gnostic must not love anyone but God inasmuch as goodness on the part of anyone but God is unthinkable'.<sup>836</sup> Al-Ghazālī states that only God can be the true giver, since God himself is the perfection of all that is good, and alone deserving of the attribution of goodness.<sup>837</sup> The third cause of love, loving a benefactor for his own sake, also leads to the love of God, since God is the benefactor to all creatures by causing them to exist and further by perfecting and beautifying the forms of their existence. It is only God's beneficence that gives to man through the creative act 'beyond the realm of what is essential or even needed'; this divine beneficence gives itself in 'loving-kindness' without any distinction of being.<sup>838</sup> It may be concluded from al-Ghazālī that only God loves without the requirement of a return or the seeking of mutual benefit. However, in following the Avicennan notion that God's love is essentially for himself, the divine gift of life becomes restrained, since this giving loses the quality of giving to another, which is natural to the operation of love. Barhebraeus entirely avoids such implications coming from the onto-theological concept of God as the necessary existent being. For this reason, he omits al-Ghazālī's argument for the third cause of love (the love for a benefactor for his own sake), in which love is deserved by God alone due to the necessary love of a being for its cause.<sup>839</sup> If God only truly loves Himself, and man's love is a necessary one, then the gift-model becomes restricted to the point that it ceases to operate. Love would not seem to follow from the necessary cause of existence, for what comes into being by necessity does not have the nature of a gift.

Barhebraeus' appropriation of al-Ghazālī's five causes of love does reveal an ontology of God's love based on the gift model, but it differs in certain respects, in keeping with the

---

<sup>835</sup> *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 24.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, 28. 'Even if it is natural for us to love a benefactor, still a gnostic must not love anyone but God inasmuch as goodness on the part of anyone but God is unthinkable. God alone is worthy of this love.'

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.* Al-Ghazālī states further that "The words "generosity" or "goodness" are either mendacious or metaphorical with regard to anyone but God.'

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>839</sup> *Ibid.*



modifications that he made to the five causes. In particular, Barhebraeus develops the fifth cause of the love of God, which is the spiritual affinity between man and God. He understands the significance of al-Ghazālī's fifth cause of the love of God, on the basis that man is the divine image.<sup>840</sup> The Spirit of God has given the form of man, for the Spirit gives life, as the dove who gives life to the living.<sup>841</sup> The soul or spirit of man is thus the divine image, and reveals the spirit of the giver in the gift of life. This is instigated through love; the love of God provides the foundation of the gift, in which love gives being to mankind and form to the soul of man. Thus the soul or spirit of man reflects the divine image, and reveals the spirit of the giver in the gift of life. While Barhebraeus refers to God as the Lord of all beings,<sup>842</sup> this title is not sufficiently adequate to express the divine presence in the world as the giving of the Spirit which pervades the earth.<sup>843</sup> Thus it is only in this giving, and not as the Being of beings, that God can be divined in the trace of the gift of love.<sup>844</sup> Marion describes the model of the gift that is expressed in love as the 'charity' or *agapē* which gives being.<sup>845</sup> This gift model is defined by distance, and thus longing defines the existential state of man as the lover whose object of love, the divine beloved, is absent from being, but present in his imagination. The state of longing thus expresses the receiving of the gift of love which is inscribed in distance the divine is present in the love which is perceived in the longing of the imagination for the perfection of what it lacks.

Al-Ghazālī states that longing depends on the remembrance of the image of the beloved in the heart of the lover, and thus for the lover whose beloved object is absent, 'His longing denotes an inner yearning to perfect his imagination'.<sup>846</sup> In this transcendent aspect of love,

---

<sup>840</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 48, 566\*.

<sup>841</sup> See the Introduction to the *Book of the Dove*, as quoted above. Ibid., 4, 523\*.

<sup>842</sup> Barhebraeus states in the fourth section of the *Ethikon*, that 'among all beings there is none more admirable and amazing, more exalted and wonderful, more complete and perfect than the Lord and the God of the beings'. Ibid., 92, 481\*.

<sup>843</sup> Ibid., 4, 523\*.

<sup>844</sup> Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 105-06. 'The giving, in allowing to be divined how "it gives," a giving, offers the only accessible trace of He who gives.'

<sup>845</sup> Ibid., 102. 'For the gift itself is liberated only in its exertion starting from and in the name of that which, greater than it, comes behind it, that which gives and expresses itself as gift, charity itself. Charity delivers Being/being.'

<sup>846</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment*, 89. 'So, for example, we say, "A man whose beloved is absent but in whose heart an image remains, longs to complete that image by direct sight."

the longing for completion and perfection of one's being lies in the desire for the other. Al-Ghazālī says that, '[e]very beloved in his concealment must become an object of longing', and the love which cannot be attained becomes longing and affirms distance.<sup>847</sup> The lover seeks the beloved who is not possessed nor fully comprehended, and thus in the love of God, the mind yearns for the beloved who is veiled in mystery.<sup>848</sup> Barhebraeus follows the analogy provided by al-Ghazālī between the corporeal longing of the lover for his beloved and that of the love of the Initiated for their Lord. The lover desires to complete the image of beauty that he has for his beloved, whose inward beauty is hidden from the lover; the desire to see this inward beauty fuels the longing of the lover. Thus, the beloved is present in the imagination, in the remembrance of the image of beauty.<sup>849</sup> Barhebraeus has borrowed from al-Ghazālī's discussion of longing in order to maintain the aspect of distance in the love of God, as well as the positive and necessary role of the faculties of imagination and memory in constructing the image of divine beauty as it reflects the form of the Good. Thus the Initiated must maintain a sense of this aesthetic awareness of 'the heavenly gift', and avoid being occupied with 'earthly things'.<sup>850</sup>

Barhebraeus' understanding of the gift of love corresponds to Marion's gift model of 'distance', within which the two poles of this love, man and God, are 'traversed' by the Spirit.<sup>851</sup> The love of God even as it is given, preserves this distance, in what Marion describes as 'a ceaseless play of giving, where the terms are united all the more in that they

---

But if his remembrance and image and knowledge of the loved one vanished from his mind, so that he forgot him, he could not conceive of longing for him.'

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 99, 487-88\*. 'Among bodily friends the lover longs after his beloved in a twofold wise. When the beloved is absent and the image of his beauty is recollected, the lover desires to see him, that his joy may be complete by meeting the beloved. Or, when this beloved is near, but his face is only visible to his friend, while his other inward beauties, which are shown in intercourse, are hidden, the lover longs after being consoled also by the sight of what is hidden. In the same way the Initiated are necessarily acquainted with these two sorts of longing, in view of the love of their Lord.'

<sup>850</sup> Ibid., 72, 590\*, Sentence 61. '...And in the soul whose thought is directed towards earthly things, the heavenly gift will not endure.'

<sup>851</sup> Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 104. Marion maintains that in this distance model of giving, 'Distance can be exchanged only in being traversed.'

are never confused'.<sup>852</sup> Barhebraeus affirms the distance in the union of the mind with God even in the final stage of love. He quotes an anonymous Initiated on the image of iron in the fire of the furnace; this was an image typical of the Syrian mystics, thus '[t]he iron alone is not to be recognized there, because it has assumed the likeness of the fire, by their union.' However even in this likeness with God, whereby 'you see not two images but one, no discrimination being possible', he maintains that 'the two substances remain separated' in the distance of the two terms in the love of God.<sup>853</sup> The love of God transforms man to become the image of God through the burning fire of love which gives to the Initiated, a beneficent love for the good of all things, 'for then his mercy is poured out over all, like that of God'.<sup>854</sup> True giving is to give without thought of recompense, to give freely is the nature of gift-giving, and therefore the Initiated when he is transformed into the likeness of God, pours out love without distinction in the merciful love for all creation.<sup>855</sup> To love without thought of return is thus the aim of the receiver of the gift, to imitate the nature of the gift of love freely given.

---

<sup>852</sup> Ibid., 105. 'Distance lays out the intimate gap between the giver and the gift, so that the self-withdrawal of the giver in the gift may be read on the gift, in the very fact that it refers back absolutely to the giver.'

<sup>853</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 116, 506\*.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid., 116, 505\*. 'Love makes the body and the senses silent; it elevates the mind to gaze on the inaccessible light of the Desired. Mercy dawns unto it and takes it to place without place, the world without denomination, the nature without beginning. And when the solitary reaches the Divine Cloud and enters the harbour of all service and sees with his mind, face to face, the glory of the Lord and is made radiant by it and is transformed into his likeness, then his mercy is poured out over all, like that of God, and the One beloved of all shows him love.' Brian Colless points out that both this quotation and the following one concerning the iron in the furnace - which he numbers 10 and 11 in the twelve quotations that are contained in this section, 'A Collection of Scattered Sayings concerning Love' - are taken from John of Dalyatha's *Sermo* 26. Colless, "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus," 170-73.

<sup>855</sup> The gift of the merciful heart is also an important notion for Isaac of Nineveh. Sebastian Brock translates this passage from *Discourse* LLXIV: 'And what is a merciful heart? He replied, 'The heart's burning for all creation, for human beings, for birds and animals, and for demons, and everything there is. At the recollection of them and at the sight of them his eyes gush forth with tears owing to the force which constrains his heart, so that, as a result of its abundant sense of mercy, the heart shrinks and cannot bear to hear or examine any harm or small suffering of anything in creation.' Brock, *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, 251.

### Introduction: The Epistemological Impasse in the Academy

Barhebraeus was concerned with the problem of the conception of God, which he articulated according to the rival traditions amongst the Syrians. The study of religion and its subdivision, the study of mysticism, have similarly inherited rival traditions of thinking about God. The classical scholars following Schleiermacher and Otto, have emphasised religious feeling and the intuitive sense of the numinous. On the other hand, the critical scholars have been influenced by the empirical tradition, and rather than transcendental values, it is on empirical evidence that Timothy Fitzgerald insists, for the academic study of religion.<sup>856</sup> The critical school of modern religious studies has led to the analysis of metaphysical truth claims of religions according to empirical methods of inquiry, i.e. what can be empirically established by objective observation.<sup>857</sup> This attitude is reflected in the study of mysticism by the wealth of academic literature on the empirical content of mystical experience, including research into the physiological and psychological states of mystical consciousness.<sup>858</sup>

The classical scholars have assumed a single super-sensory reality to which all mystical phenomena ultimately refer, and thus the mystical experience is referential in nature and descriptive of this ultimate reality.<sup>859</sup> The supposedly 'common core' of mysticism, such as

---

<sup>856</sup> Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47. Fitzgerald makes this argument here as a critique of the classical approach to religion by W. C. Smith.

<sup>857</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 170-75. Flood critiques this development in religious studies thus (p171): 'The truth value of religious language that is metaphysical (and does not make empirical claims subjected to contradiction by strong counter-evidence) cannot be recognized by criteria of truth brought in from another discourse, particularly a scientific one.'

<sup>858</sup> Jonathan Shear, "On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 328-31. This kind of objective scientific research is outlined by Shear in his response to Bertrand Russell's 1961 essay, "Critique of Mysticism".

<sup>859</sup> Waardenburg outlines the understanding of religion, including that of spirituality, held by the 'classical scholars' of religion such as Rudolf Otto, Max Weber and Evelyn Underhill, in the development of the academic study of religion from 1850 to 1950; see particularly the section on 'The Classical Scholars: their Virtues and Limitations' in his *Preface*. Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion : Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research*, x-xiv.

Otto's theory of the numinous where the mystical experience can be understood as a sense of the 'wholly other', is a reflection of this transcendental ideal.<sup>860</sup> The emphasis on religious feeling by Schleiermacher that was so influential for Otto, has given rise to an intuitive sense of God that contains its own non-propositional claim to truth, even if such intuitions can, according to Otto, 'neither be built into a system nor used as premisses for theoretical conclusions'.<sup>861</sup> Schleiermacher formulated his theory of religion in direct response to the scientific rationalisation of religion, and thus the roots of the impasse within the study of mysticism lie in the field of religion.

Richard King has identified the division in the approaches to the study of mysticism as forged between the supposition of a transcendent reality to all mystical experiences and the view that such experiences are bound to the cultures which construct them. The perennialist philosophy of mysticism, believes in what King calls the 'Myth of the Transcendent Object'. This position extends the presupposition of a universal ontic reality by the classical scholars into the modern study of mysticism, with contemporary proponents such as Huston Smith.<sup>862</sup> A counter-position is taken by those scholars following the constructivist approach, for whom mystical experience is determined by the context which is formative, and thus they depend on another 'myth', that of the isolated context:

Perennialist philosophers postulate a common core – that is, some kind of transcendent reality or truth that underlies the diversity of mystical accounts. In contrast to this, Katzian constructivism is grounded in a form of cultural isolationism or the 'Myth of the Isolated Context'. On this view all mystical experiences are fundamentally culturally bound, rendering the establishment of cross-cultural similarities inherently problematic.<sup>863</sup>

---

<sup>860</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 25-30.

<sup>861</sup> Otto discusses Schleiermacher's idea of the mind's capability for 'intuitions' and 'feelings' in terms of the faculty of 'divination', whereby 'Their import is the glimpse of an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it, the apprehension of a ground and meaning of things in and beyond the empirical and transcending it'. Ibid., 146-47.

<sup>862</sup> For example, Huston Smith, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987).

<sup>863</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 183.

The current impasse in the academic study of mysticism is between a naive essentialism that would pose universal transcendent objects for mysticism and a cultural relativism that would concentrate on the social contingency of the mystic's experience, which is the emphasis promulgated by Katz.<sup>864</sup> These are, of course, the extreme positions in the study of mysticism. There are scholars who have espoused more nuanced positions, but even these can be broadly categorised as assuming either a universal reality (be it consciousness or transcendent object) or a socio-linguistic context, as formative for the mystical experience.

For Katz and the other contributors to his volumes on mysticism, the cultural context constructs the mystical experience, following the theorisation of the social construction of all knowledge put forward in the field of sociology by scholars such as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.<sup>865</sup> This approach may also be called 'perceptual relativism', as classified in the introduction to the edited volume *Rationality and Relativism*, in contrast to moral or conceptual relativism.<sup>866</sup> Perceptual relativism has two related strands, the first being that 'what we perceive cannot be perceived by the nature of the object perceived', and the second being the more specific claim that 'language in some sense determines or constitute what is perceived'.<sup>867</sup> Peter Winch in *The Idea of a Social Science* expresses this kind of relativism in his statement that 'Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use.'<sup>868</sup> Barry Barnes and David Bloor have argued in their article, "Relativism, Rationalism, Sociology of Knowledge", that there is no core of concepts which depend upon a form of reasoning that is not conditioned by culturally specific conventions:

---

<sup>864</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 26.

<sup>865</sup> King, *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*, 169-70. This point is discussed in my chapter on the Hermeneutics of Mysticism.

<sup>866</sup> Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 5-9.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>868</sup> Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science, and Its Relation to Philosophy*, 15. "The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world."

There are no privileged occasions for the use of terms – no ‘simple perceptual situations’ – which provide the researcher with ‘standard meanings’ uncomplicated by cultural variables.<sup>869</sup>

The volumes edited by Katz, broadly approach the study of mysticism from this perceptual relativism, generally referred to in the secondary literature as ‘constructivism’.<sup>870</sup> In the 1970’s and 1980’s Katzian constructivism appeared to be the dominant approach to the study of mysticism, due to the publication of two monographs: *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (1978), and then *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (1983).<sup>871</sup> Robert Forman, a staunch critic of Katz’s approach, edited a rival volume of articles published *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (1990) which took a substantially ‘destructive’ approach to the kind of epistemology assumed as normative by scholars including Steven Katz, Kenneth Moore, Hans Penner and Wayne Proudfoot.<sup>872</sup> Donald Rothberg has located the epistemological position of these scholars broadly within the Western tradition of ‘post-Kantian epistemology’, scholars for whom the principle of the mediation of all experience is foundational to their epistemological model for the study of mysticism.<sup>873</sup> Rothberg thus has stated:

Katz’s constructivist approach to mystical traditions seems to come closest to a combination of naturalism and especially to what I have called contextualist interpretative theory.<sup>874</sup>

For Rothberg, the naturalistic approach is one that seeks causal explanation, and this kind of inquiry ‘aims at empirical *explanation*’.<sup>875</sup> The contextualists, also identified by Rothberg

---

<sup>869</sup> Barry Barnes and David Bloor, "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge," in *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 39.

<sup>870</sup> See Forman’s introduction to this volume. Robert K. C. Forman, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness : Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>871</sup> Katz has proceeded with two more recent volumes of articles on mysticism. Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Language* (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* (Oxford England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>872</sup> Forman outlines the approach of this collected volume *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* in his article. Robert K. C. Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 708.

<sup>873</sup> Donald Rothberg, "Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness : Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 174.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

as ‘cultural relativists’, are divided from the universalists, in their insistence that ‘there are no fixed meanings or rules “out there” or embedded “in here” in the subject’.<sup>876</sup> Amongst the most influential theorists of interpretive inquiry for the contextualists, Rothberg cites the claim by Ludwig Wittgenstein ‘that there is no neutral epistemological vantage point’, alongside the approaches of Peter Winch, Gadamer, Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida.<sup>877</sup> However, for the constructivist position in the study of mysticism, the emphasis of Wittgenstein on language games and of Winch on local standards of rationality, would seem to be the more dominant influences. Gadamer’s model of dialogical hermeneutics as interpretive inquiry does not actually belong to cultural relativism, but rather can be used to resolve the epistemological impasse with the universalism or essentialism in the study of mysticism. The dialogical model of inquiry would allow mystical traditions to inform epistemological assumptions, essentialist and constructivist, instead of approaching these traditions as simply the data for academic study.

#### Epistemology and the Intentionality of Consciousness

In contrast to Syrian epistemology, when the modern study of mysticism affirms the intentionality of consciousness as ‘consciousness of’ something, it does not posit ‘God’ or an equivalent concept like ‘the supernatural’ as the object of mystical consciousness, but instead an experiential state takes the place of the transcendental. The consciousness of the mystic or the mystical consciousness is reduced either to the culturally conditioned beliefs of the mystic or to the purely phenomenological characterisation of the experience itself, principally the pure consciousness of ‘forgetting’. The consequence of this epistemological focus on the mystical experience, has overshadowed the inquiry into the mystics’ ontological understanding of God. Therefore when the mystical experience is understood as either the ‘deconditioning’ or the ‘reconditioning’ of consciousness, the academic literature has apparently little to say about the intentional object of these processes, except

---

<sup>876</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>877</sup> Ibid.



in terms of the characterisation of the consciousness itself, the deconditioned 'pure consciousness' or a form of 'conditioned-contextual consciousness'.<sup>878</sup>

The perennial philosophy uses the notion of a common core of mystical experience as evidence for the existence of a divine order of being.<sup>879</sup> However, the critical scholars have distanced themselves from such metaphysical speculation, and in the study of mysticism Katz has asserted that the aim of his new contextual approach has been specifically not to 'begin with *a priori* assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality'.<sup>880</sup> Wayne Proudfoot argues that the intuition emphasised by Otto and Schleiermacher, presupposes the intentionality of the mind towards an object of consciousness and is based on the equation of intuition with religious feeling that would have the immediacy that is 'characteristic of sensations'.<sup>881</sup> Since sensations are subject to the doctrine of intentionality, Schleiermacher's emphasis on the feeling of absolute dependence cannot escape the subject-object problem. Schleiermacher's religious 'feeling of' requires an intentional object for its state of dependence and thus in his formulation, 'that object is given by the prepositional object used to specify the state'.<sup>882</sup> Schleiermacher's understanding of religion is thus not theoretically consistent in Proudfoot's reading, though it is an attempt to resolve the subject-object problem in the conception of God. In their article on the critical term 'God' in religious studies, Schüssler Fiorenza and Kaufman show how in the Western turn to subjectivity, the knowledge of God became 'restricted to subjectivity', with the 'idea of the infinite' grounded in the reasoning subject by Descartes (1596-1650CE), and with religion a 'pious subjectivity' located in inner feeling by Schleiermacher as a response to Enlightenment rationality.<sup>883</sup> This is partly why Schleiermacher's approach to

---

<sup>878</sup> Katz argues for the latter position. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 57. For it is in appearance only that such activities as yoga produce the desired state of 'pure' consciousness. Properly understood, yoga, for example, is *not* an *unconditioning* or *deconditioning* of consciousness, but rather it is a *reconditioning* of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/or contextual consciousness for another, albeit a new, unusual, and perhaps altogether more interesting form of conditioned-contextual consciousness.'

<sup>879</sup> Forman, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," 3-5.

<sup>880</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 66.

<sup>881</sup> Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 11.

<sup>882</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>883</sup> Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and Gordon D. Kaufman, "God," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 146.

religion has proved so influential to the classical scholars of mysticism, for whom the mystical experience provides the empirical evidence for a phenomenon which overcomes the rationalisation of religion in modernity,<sup>884</sup> and similarly for the constructivists, this focus on subjectivity is maintained in the emphasis on mystical consciousness.

Rothberg shows that scholars such as Proudfoot and Katz have assumed objective neutrality in their epistemological approach, which in fact depends on the history of modern Western epistemology and thus is shaped by the Western context. Rothberg argues that it follows from the approach of these scholars, that through an understanding of 'the inescapability of context and the mediated nature of all experiences', we are provided with 'a more "objective" way to understand mysticism'.<sup>885</sup> However, such an epistemology is specifically derived from the post-Kantian tradition and this understanding of mystical consciousness is developed from the theory of intentionality in the phenomenology of Husserl and Brentano. It is to Franz Brentano's theory of 'intentional inexistence' that Katz refers when he affirms 'that linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object',' and thus for Katz, the intentional objects of mystical consciousness are not assured an ontological category of existence.<sup>886</sup> Katz further concludes that intentional language is formative for the acts of consciousness,

... but we must also recognize the epistemologically formative character of intentional language mirroring as it does intentional acts of consciousness. Using the language modern phenomenologists favour we might say that 'intentionality' means to describe a 'datum as meant', i.e. to be aware that an action includes a reach for some specific meaning or meaningful content.<sup>887</sup>

In this manner, Katz is content to focus on 'the epistemologically formative character of intentional language', rather than the referential objects within the language of the mystics, and the meaning of this data is always subsumed to circumstances of the intentional experience, rather than the meaning that is expressed in language. This

---

<sup>884</sup> This is for example, the complaint of William James in his lecture on philosophy. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*, 431.

<sup>885</sup> Rothberg, "Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism," 170.

<sup>886</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 63.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid.

becomes problematic when, as his critics like Forman and Rothberg point out, mystics often specifically claim to possess a type of knowledge that is not structured according to Western epistemology in its post-Kantian vein. For example, Rothberg accuses Katz of instituting a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, against mystical traditions which espouse an epistemology which conflicts with the one to which he adheres.<sup>888</sup> For Rothberg the constructivist epistemology of mysticism ‘flounders in the *aporia* created by affirming that all viewpoints are situated and mediated while implicitly affirming that his own approach is an exception’.<sup>889</sup> However, the theory of pure consciousness, does not solve this *aporia* posed by cultural relativism, and instead reaffirms the epistemological impasse by adopting an essentialist view of the mystical experience against the constructivists.

In order to overcome this impasse, it is necessary to inquire into the presuppositions of both positions in the argument over the intentionality of mystical consciousness. The exclusive focus of this debate is on the subjective nature of the mystical experience, and the kind of epistemology appropriate to the task of interpretation, and the objective content of mystical claims have tended to be overlooked. However, both the objective and the subjective features form an integral part of the mystical phenomenon, as Frits Staal points out, and thus while ‘mystical doctrines purport to deal with objective reality, mystical experiences have a subjective quality’.<sup>890</sup> For Staal, there are two aspects then to the investigation into mystical claims, both as they relate to the experiencing subject and to an order of ontological reality.<sup>891</sup> Katz does state explicitly that the objects of mystical experience as they are described are not ‘arbitrary labels of some underlying common reality’, but rather they ‘carry a meaning relative to some ontological structure’.<sup>892</sup> However, Katz still manages to essentialise the mystical claims about objective reality and its ontological structure according to his universal theory of consciousness. On the other

---

<sup>888</sup> Rothberg, "Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism," 180.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>890</sup> Staal, *Exploring Mysticism : A Methodological Essay*, 57.

<sup>891</sup> Staal clarifies his own use of the terms subjective and objective in his methodological essay, that is: “subjective” in the sense of “relating to the subject,” which is complemented by “objective” in the sense of “relating to the object.”’ *ibid.*

<sup>892</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 56.

hand, the approaches of the perennialist and classical scholars tend to pose universal frameworks for the objects of mystical experience in a way which is similarly based on an essentialist understanding of mystical subjectivity as a sense of something other. Neither approach appreciates that their near-exclusive concern with the epistemology of how the mind knows its object of consciousness, assumes a subject-object structure to the knowledge of God that is universal across religious traditions, when in fact it belongs to the history of Western philosophy. In the following section, the background to this legacy of thinking about God for the study of mysticism will be further considered as well as the possibilities for its revision, in dialogue with the Syrian mystics.

## **The Problem of ‘God’ in the Study of Mystical Experience**

Religious traditions presuppose an object, an object called ‘God’ in the academic study of religion; but this relies on the epistemology of a subject-object distinction between man and God, a distinction which necessitates the objectification of ‘God’ and provides the connection between epistemology and ontology. The notion of God as a radically different object is implicit in the academic study of mysticism, which has tended to impose this subject-object distinction on the traditions that it studies. Therefore a more reflective approach to the nature of God will inform the study of mysticism, leading to the substantive issue of how God is to be studied, and the adequacy of the two standard ontological models suggested by academics as a framework for mysticism, the theistic and the monistic. In studying the Syrian mystical tradition, it may be seen that the issue of the possibility of true knowledge of God was subject to similar tensions according to the rival epistemologies inherited from the Greeks. The conclusions reached by Barhebraeus also offer substantive insights into how mystical traditions respond to the objectification of God as the concept.

### **The Subject-Object Distinction in the Epistemology of Mystical Experience**

The substantive issue of how the nature of God is to be understood in the mystical experience has been largely absent from discussions of mysticism in the Western academy,

partly as a result of the relativist criticism of the metaphysical presuppositions of the classical scholars in the study of mysticism. The classical approach to mysticism has been substantially critiqued both within the study of mysticism and also more broadly within the study of religion by the critical school. Fitzgerald has for example dismissed scholars like Smart who in continuing the approach of Schleiermacher and Otto, conduct the agenda of ecumenical liberal theology for religious studies.<sup>893</sup> However, Smart's approach does attempt to develop the classical scholars' contribution in a more nuanced direction, rather than rejecting their work on the basis of its theological bias. The so-called ecumenical liberal theology of the classical scholars is apparent in the metaphysical presuppositions imposed on their material, along with the tendency to universalise traditions that have become homogenised when displaced from their context and reformulated within the prejudices of the Western academic study of mysticism.<sup>894</sup> On the other hand, subsequent trends in this discipline have offered similarly constrictive frameworks according to their Western epistemological background; in avoiding metaphysical questions they have projected on their data materialist or naturalistic viewpoints, which contain their own metaphysical presuppositions.

The classical scholars typically presumed a theistic understanding of mysticism; Otto's theology of the 'numen' is the basis for his understanding of mysticism, with mystics possessing in the numinous consciousness, a feeling of the 'wholly other' which is beyond ordinary experience and 'Being'.<sup>895</sup> Zaehner and Stace developed the classical models, seeking to diversify the theistic understanding of the mystical experience, inherited from Schleiermacher and his sense of absolute dependence (on God). Smart adapted Zaehner's theistic and monistic positions in terms of the distinction between the numinous experience of a sacred other, and the attainment of an inner state of mystical subjectivity, a

---

<sup>893</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, 7.

<sup>894</sup> Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 172. Flood asserts that for academics to make universalist assumptions about the metaphysical reality of *nibbāna* or *theosis*, 'from an external, supposedly epistemically neutral standpoint, is in fact to recontextualise the concepts within another framework with its own rules of coherence'.

<sup>895</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 29.

state which was not unlike Zaehner's 'panenhenic' experience.<sup>896</sup> However, in Stace's understanding of mysticism there is a narrowing of focus on the subjectivity of the experiencing self; such an emphasis that might be understood according to what Katz calls 'Stace's own monistic, introvertive bias'.<sup>897</sup> Moreover, Stace's notion of the introvertive mystical experience as one of unitary or 'pure' consciousness, without empirical content,<sup>898</sup> has become influential for contemporary scholars seeking a universal trait for mysticism that would counter the excessive relativizing of mystical traditions by the constructivists.

Forman has led a concerted attempt to revise the conclusions of the earlier theorists of the phenomenology of mysticism such as Stace and Zaehner, in order to develop an alternative epistemological approach to the study of mysticism. In particular, he has developed Stace's idea of the experience of pure consciousness in introvertive mysticism, whereby 'the experience is of the self itself'.<sup>899</sup> Forman's championing of the empirical and epistemological value of the mystical experience of pure consciousness, forms the basis for, if not a common core, at least a common trait in mystical experience, such that the mystical experience can be rescued from the intentionality of ordinary consciousness. However Forman's new model for mystical experience has had the effect of neglecting the other emphasis in the mystical experience suggested by the classical scholars, the sense of the numinous or the perception of transcendence. In Forman's view of mysticism the theistic model of mysticism has receded in favour of the nihilistic, consequently the notion of 'God' as an object of the mystical experience has disappeared from view. Along with the tendency of the classical scholars to emphasise a particular metaphysical viewpoint over others, Forman's model has universalised the perspective of the Advaitan and Buddhist schools across mystical traditions. According to his reading, Shankara, Meister Eckhart and the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* would all seem to refer to pure consciousness as an experience of nothingness.<sup>900</sup> Thus Louise Nelstrop, in her overview of contemporary

---

<sup>896</sup> Smart adapts Zaehner's rather dogmatic distinction between the theistic and monistic forms of mysticism into his own division of the 'numinous' from the 'mystical' experience. For the distinction of the numinous from the mystical, see Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 13.

<sup>897</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 51.

<sup>898</sup> Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 86.

<sup>899</sup> Forman, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," 8.

<sup>900</sup> Forman recognizes this as a criticism of his model. "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 732.

theoretical approaches to Christian mystics, suggests that Forman 'can arguably be described as extending a perennialist-type position' in his approach to mysticism.<sup>901</sup> Forman has substituted the transcendental object of the perennial philosophy for the atheistic ideals of Theravāda Buddhism, so that his universal trait of the mystical experience is not an experience of God. It may be acknowledged that there is indeed precedent in the religious traditions of Jainism and Theravāda Buddhism for what Staal calls, the 'view that mysticism has nothing to do with Gods'.<sup>902</sup> However, with Forman this perspective has been elevated to a normative status for the mystical consciousness *per se*, which fails to differentiate the kind of negative assertions made in Buddhism to those made in other mystical traditions, particularly theistic ones.

Forman's emphasis on the type of mystical consciousness that is 'without the ordinary subject-object distinction' is insightful.<sup>903</sup> However, he proceeds to impose his own empirical theory of pure consciousness on all kinds of mystical data as a critique of dualist ontological structures. Forman states that the 'what' that is encountered in the highest mystical experience of the soul, '*is the merest awareness itself*', and continues that this state of awareness cannot be classed as an object of consciousness, for '[t]here is no distinction between subject and object in it, and it is the merest being present'.<sup>904</sup> In asserting that pure consciousness is devoid of any distinction between subject and object, Forman appears to assume that the nothingness of the mystical experience precludes any reference to 'God', since the highest mystical experience is without any object external to the self, transcendent or otherwise.

The epistemological problem debated between Katz and Forman, is how the mind can possess unmediated awareness of anything. On the one hand, Katz argues that even the so-called 'mystical consciousness' experiences its objects though the structures of language, doctrine and belief. On the other, Forman maintains that the mystical consciousness is to be

---

<sup>901</sup> Louise Nelstrop, Kevin J. Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism : An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 10.

<sup>902</sup> Staal, *Exploring Mysticism : A Methodological Essay*, 196. Staal also gives the example of Advaita Vedānta as offering a similar perspective of mystical states being without a divine cause.

<sup>903</sup> Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 732.

<sup>904</sup> *Ibid.*, 714.

distinguished from ordinary consciousness in being object-less. Both readings are problematic in that the ontological claims contained within the accounts of mystical experiences are put to one side. The dispute over the correct epistemology for the interpretation of the mystical experience does not engage with the metaphysical truth claims, both positive and negative, implied by the intentional object(s) of mystical consciousness. In the theorisation of pure consciousness by Forman and others such as Rothberg, any transcendent aspect to the experience of the experiencing self, which is retained for example even within Zaehner's notion of the panenhenic experience of the oneness of self with being, is precluded by the insistence on the lack of any cognitive content to the Pure Conscious Event or PCE.

However, omitting the subject of God from the inquiry into mysticism itself makes a further assumption, namely that in avoiding the subject-object distinction between man and the God, the mystic retreats from any notion of 'God' whatsoever. In fact, it is the ontology of God presumed by the subject-object distinction that is the problem for the mystics, for whom the distinction implies an objectification of God. It is the mystic's critique of conventional metaphysics, reflected in their secondary critique of the subject-object epistemology in the concept of God, which is the inspiration for their assertion of nothingness. This serves as a negation of the epistemology that conceives of God as an object of the mind's perception.

#### **The Metaphysical Critique in Mystic Discourse**

In the mystical tradition of the Syrian monastics, the problem lies not with the characterisation of the experience of God, but how God can be experienced by the mind in a way that does not reduce God to a concept. For the mystics of the Syrian tradition who were particularly influenced by Greek Neoplatonic epistemology - Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Stephen bar Šūdhailē - the question was how the mind could possess unmediated awareness of God, so that 'God' could be freed from the idolatrous images of sense perception. This consideration of 'God' as an object of the mind is a type of thinking which connects metaphysics to epistemology; if 'God' can be thought



only according to the subject-object epistemological distinction, then 'God' may be thought through the metaphysical speculation about the being (*ousia*) of beings (*ta onta*). The Syrian mystics objected to this entire line of reasoning that God was not to be reasoned by the mind from speculation on being, and that metaphysics should not be brought into the discourse about God. Indeed the academic study of mysticism has tended to assume a metaphysical content to mystical experience, either positive or negative, that is being or not-being. However, this assumes implicitly that mystic discourse makes metaphysical claims about the experience of God, when rather it seeks precisely to critique metaphysical thinking about God in terms of Being or *ousia*.

Michael A. Sells, a comparative scholar of mysticism, whose book *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* focuses on the epistemological significance of negative language in mysticism, also includes a discussion of the critique of Greek metaphysical thinking in Christian mysticism.<sup>905</sup> Sells has asserted 'the interrelation of ontology and epistemology' that is inherited by the Western mystical tradition under the influence of the Christian Neo-Platonists, Pseudo-Dionysius and Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>906</sup> In Sells' opinion, it may be understood from the Greek writings of these early mystics of the Christian East. The phrase 'beyond-being' is central to Dionysian negative theology, but rather than originating with him, it already appears in the Platonic dialogues and then in Plotinus' *Enneads*, as that which does not 'speak its name' and cannot be circumscribed.<sup>907</sup> For the Christian mystical tradition in the Latin West, the Neoplatonic intuition that God is somehow 'beyond-being' (*epekeina ousias*) similarly becomes a crucial one, with the understanding that being is

---

<sup>905</sup> Sells emphasizes the importance of Plotinus in the apophatic element within Christian mysticism. See Sells, 'Though elements of apophasis existed earlier, it was Plotinus who wove these elements and his own original and mystical insights into a discourse of sustained apophatic intensity'. Michael Anthony Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid., 36. 'Within the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena integrated into his own apophatic discourse both Dionysius' affirmation that the deity was "beyond-being" and Gregory's suggestion that the "nothing" in the doctrine of "creation from nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*) was the divine nothingness out of which all being proceeds.'

<sup>907</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.5.6.11-17. "'The beyond-being" does not refer to a some-thing since it does not posit any-thing, nor does it "speak its name" [Plat. *Parm.* 132 a 3]. It merely indicates that it is "not that". No attempt is made to circumscribe it. It would be absurd to circumscribe that immense nature. To wish to do so is to cut oneself off from its slightest trace.' *ibid.*, 15.

what is perceived by the mind, and thus what transcends being cannot be thought through the same methods of reasoning.<sup>908</sup>

This integration of thinking and being was inherited from Greek metaphysics. For the scholastics what can be thought about God is what can be speculated about the divine being, and thus God becomes reduced to the concept of being. For the Greeks thinking and speaking are parallel activities, in that *logos* refers to both speech and reason, a dual meaning reflected in the Syriac word *meltā*.<sup>909</sup> The Syrians inherited the Neoplatonic development of Aristotelian philosophy. With Aristotle, thinking becomes formulated in the discourse of *logos*, and the *logos* what can be said about something.<sup>910</sup> Heidegger in his work, the *Introduction to Metaphysics* discusses in some depth the relation of being to thinking in Greek philosophy:

One understands *noein* as thinking, and thinking as an activity of the subject. The subject's thinking determines what Being is. Being is nothing other than what is thought by thinking.<sup>911</sup>

In the relation of being to thinking in the thinking of God within scholasticism, God is thought through the being of beings and thus God becomes the highest being that can be conceived by the thinking subject. The critique of the metaphysical thinking about God in the Christian mystic tradition is directed against this development in scholasticism of both the Latin West and Syrian East. Christian scholasticism inherits the kind of philosophical thinking which is controlled by the science of *logos*, the *epistēmē logikē* of the Platonic-Aristotelian schools, the Greek 'scholastic' thinking in which logic forms the rules of

---

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 36. Sells states that the notion of the 'beyond-being' appears also in the *Periphyseon* of John the Scot Eriugena (810-877CE) and was inspired by his translation of the Dionysian corpus into Medieval Latin. Sells comments on the significance of this notion for the *Periphyseon*, that, 'To be is to be able to be grasped by the mind. That which transcends the mind must necessarily transcend being.'

<sup>909</sup> Becker emphasises the influence on the East Syrians by the Neoplatonic focus on semantics, for investigation into something begins with the correct way of speaking about it. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, 134-35.

<sup>910</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 132. Heidegger argues that the word *logos* comes to mean 'saying' and 'discourse', though the originary meaning is that of 'gathering'.

<sup>911</sup> Ibid., 145. For Heidegger in fact, there is a 'disjunction' of thinking from Being in the pre-Socratics, and he argues that the philosophy of Parmenides and Heraclitus have been misrepresented as anticipating Kant and German idealism.

scientific knowledge, or *epistēmē*.<sup>912</sup> In onto-theological discourse, which is informed by scholastic metaphysics, the subject of its discourse, God, is reasoned through *epistēmē logikē* and thus the Christian God enters into the Aristotelian categories of being.<sup>913</sup> In the Syrian tradition, a sustained critique was made of such developments, but the opposition of the Syrian mystics to onto-theology derives from the fourth-century monk, Evagrius Ponticus, whose Greek writings were inspirational to the flourishing of the East Syrian mystics in later centuries. When Evagrius made his assertion about the ineffability of God, this is to claim that God cannot be described according to the categories of form or species of Greek metaphysics, for these belong to a thinking determined by being.<sup>914</sup>

The connection between metaphysics and mystic discourse is implicit in the latter's aim which critiques the metaphysical conception of God as a divine being; a theological approach termed by Heidegger as 'onto-theo-logy'. However, this critique of ontotheology implicit within mystic discourse must in turn be applied to the academic study of mysticism, which has tended to presuppose this very ontotheology in its interpretation of the mystics. Mystic discourse, in the Certeau sense as the early modern writings of mystics, critiques metaphysical conceptions of God within scholasticism. The academic study of mysticism that studies mystic discourse, presupposes both positively and negatively, a metaphysical conception of God. However, this was a conception critiqued by mystic discourse about God. For the academic study of mysticism to do justice to its reading of mystic discourse, it must reflexively rethink its metaphysical assumptions, in order to find an appropriate language that resonates with mystic discourse's intent to critique metaphysics.

---

<sup>912</sup> Ibid., 127-8. Heidegger states that, "Logic" and "the logical" are simply not the ways to define thinking without further ado, as if nothing else were possible. On the other hand, it was no accident that the doctrine of thinking became "logic".

<sup>913</sup> Marion traces this decisive move to Thomas Aquinas and Descartes in the history of Western philosophy. Marion, *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 82.

<sup>914</sup> Columba Stewart shows how Evagrius makes theological claims about God with metaphysical implications, when he claims that God is above all perception and thought, is immaterial and without form, and thus cannot be recognised by sensory perceptions. Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," 191-92.

### Ineffability and the Problem of Language

In the academic study of mysticism, the assertion of ineffability in mystic discourse has been treated as a metaphysical or rather anti-metaphysical claim. Ineffability was initially identified by William James as one of the most important marks of mysticism (alongside the noetic quality) in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and thereafter was much discussed.<sup>915</sup> Scholars have interpreted ineffability to be descriptive of the experiential state of the mystic, which demands knowledge by direct acquaintance. Katz does accept James's definition of ineffability as defying expression, but rejects the assumption that ineffability claims in mystical accounts can be used to infer a common ontic reality to all mystical experience.<sup>916</sup> Instead he affirms that the common identification of ineffability and paradoxicality cannot provide a sufficient foundation for a phenomenology or typology of mystical experience. The mystic assertion of ineffability does not render the experience intelligible, but rather removes the experience from description. As a logical consequence, there is an absence of data with which to construct a phenomenology out of the mystic claims of ineffability.<sup>917</sup>

Sells has interpreted ineffability as an epistemological claim about the inadequacy of language, a claim which is logically inconsistent, since the mystic both asserts an object X, but then insists on the impossibility of describing this object which the mystic has reified in language through the assertion of X.<sup>918</sup> For Sells, this *aporia* generates what he calls the mystic's 'language of unsaying', which is a 'mode of discourse', rather than simply a strategy of negation.<sup>919</sup> Sells considers apophasis or 'un-saying' as functioning according to the *aporia*, the paradox of the affirmation of the transcendence of God through the negation of assertions which assume quiddity, or thing-ness to God.<sup>920</sup> However, in the emphasis on the performance of this language of unsaying, mystics would themselves seem to be caught

---

<sup>915</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*, 380-81. 'The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others.'

<sup>916</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 48.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>918</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 2. 'Any statement of ineffability, "X is beyond names," generates the *aporia* that the subject of the statement must be named (as X) in order for us to affirm that it is beyond names.'

<sup>919</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>920</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-4.

in the *aporia* of ineffability;<sup>921</sup> even the strategy of the apophatic mystics being constrained by the continual linguistic enactment of the tension between the positive and negative affirmations. Sells does admit, because classical apophasis does in fact ‘posit, despite itself, substantialist deities’, that this means that it must be engaged ‘in a self-critical stance, an acknowledgment of its own reifications, and a relentless turning-back to unsay them’.<sup>922</sup> The apophasis of Western mystics, such as Pseudo-Dionysius and Eckhart, has been subject to the accusation made by Derrida, that the ineffable beyond-being does not escape metaphysics, but is as Sells puts it, ‘just another form of entity, a God beyond God, a hidden God’.<sup>923</sup> For this criticism to be countered, it would need to be shown that mystic discourse does more than exist within the tension of the kataphatic and apophatic modes, as proposed by Sells.<sup>924</sup>

The very notion of ‘beyond-being’ remains dependent on and unable to escape the thinking of being when it is constrained by the objectifying nature of propositional discourse. In the formal logic of Aristotle, the linguistic statement is ‘a determination of something about something’ and thus is either an affirmation (*kata-phasis*) or a denial (*apo-phasis*), that is to say something (*phasis*) in the sense of belonging or not belonging to something.<sup>925</sup> Apophatic speech thus depends on the kataphatic, affirmation and negation forming the twin poles of the discourse formalised in propositional logic. In Sells’ theory of apophatic discourse, the apophatic mode of ‘unsaying’ depends on the assertion of something, and

---

<sup>921</sup> Michael Sells refers to the classic formulation of this *aporia* by Augustine, in which the dilemma of making ineffability claims about God is resolved by silence. *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>922</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, n. 31.

<sup>923</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>924</sup> *Ibid.*, 224, n. 27. References to the critique by Derrida and the counter-argument of John Caputo are given by Sells. Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Languages of the Unsayable : The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, Irvine Studies in the Humanities (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). See John Caputo’s response as a critique of Derridean deconstruction, ‘In classical terms, the being of deconstruction always exists *in alio*, by inhabiting the discourse of others’. John D. Caputo, "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart," in *Derrida and Deconstruction*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, Continental Philosophy (New York ; London: Routledge, 1989), 30.

<sup>925</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* [Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz.], trans. Michael Heim, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 22-23.

thus these logical distinctions are maintained.<sup>926</sup> However, instead of affirmation and negation being the opposition of two propositions in the classical rule of non-contradiction, i.e. *P* is not *Q*, apophatic discourse would operate through the tension of the opposition between *P* and *Q*.<sup>927</sup> Sells has proposed that the paradoxes or *aporias* of apophatic discourse are neither illogical nor irrational, but supersede the logic of 'object entities'.<sup>928</sup> However, the logic of an object entity is located not in the thing itself but within the very structure of propositional language which makes statements about the ontological relation of things. This logic cannot be superseded by simply changing the 'subject of discourse', as Sells suggests, since the metaphysical structure of logical discourse requires object entities, i.e. things which are; therefore a discourse which is not ruled by the categories of being must overcome the rules of logic.

In the Syrian tradition, Barhebraeus' mysticism adopts an alternative mode of discourse altogether, in order to overcome the operation of classical logic within Syrian theological discourse. From the perspective of the Syrian mystics who followed the Evagrian tradition, the Aristotelian categories and laws of logic that had come to predominate the scholastic tradition of onto-theology, had reduced God to a concept. When mystics like Evagrius asserted the ineffability of the transcendent object of their experience, this was to claim that 'God' is not subject to the rules of the proposition that would impose categories on 'God' according to the metaphysical structure of language. The mystic tradition sought a kind of thinking that could do justice to the transcendence of God; one that was not articulated according to Aristotelian logic and categories of being. How to express the notion of the 'beyond' (Gr. *epekeina*), thus became a crucial concern for mystic discourse, with the aim of finding a linguistic mode which could operate outside of the categories of

---

<sup>926</sup> Sells provides the meaning of these terms in the Greek language, but he does not point out their logical etymology in the propositional statement. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 2-3.

<sup>927</sup> In Barhebraeus' summary of *Peri Hermeneias*, his chapter on propositions states that [8a] 'A proposition is a declaratory utterance' (i.e. *logos apophatikos*), and his chapter on contradiction that [10a] 'Contradiction consists in the opposition of two propositions in affirmation and negation, so that one of them is true, whereas the other is false.' Herman F. Janssens, "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52, no. 1 (1935): 16, 20.

<sup>928</sup> Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, 3-4. 'Real contradictions occur when language engages the ineffable transcendent, but these contradictions are not illogical. For the apophatic writer, the logical rule of non-contradiction functions for object entities. When the subject of discourse is a non-object and no-thing, it is not irrational that such a logic be superseded.'

being. When 'beyond being' is understood as a 'thing', rather than a strategy of thinking which moves beyond, then *the* 'beyond being' as a definite noun, becomes just another metaphysical idol that mystic discourse sought to circumvent. Barhebraeus and the world of Syrian mysticism enable the exploration of the problem of thinking God through being, since his solution to this problem was not dependent on the discourse of metaphysics, but on a 'post-metaphysical' language, that of love.

## The Contribution of Syrian Hermeneutics

The problem confronting Barhebraeus was that of the conflict between the Scholastics and the Evagrian mystics concerning the knowledge of God and specifically how the concept could govern the truly divine God. The Evagrian mystical tradition posited an unmediated awareness of God that was not controlled by the metaphysics of being. However, in the intellectualist approach to God of Neoplatonic Evagrianism, God was placed outside of being and without relation to being. God as pure intellect acted as another idol, in which God was reduced to the concept. Therefore, in the metaphysical conception of God as pure being, 'God' became reified as an object of perception. In the Evagrian conception of God as pure intellect, 'God' retreated into the abstraction of the ideas.<sup>929</sup> These two positions represented the two dominant philosophical traditions that the Syrians received from the Greeks in Late Antiquity - Platonic idealism and Aristotelian realism.<sup>930</sup> For the scholastics, Aristotelian metaphysics and the categories rendered an understanding of God that was reasoned through created being, while for the Evagrian mystics, only Platonic intuition of the divine forms through the practice of *theōria* or contemplation, could reach the knowledge of the divine things. These rival epistemologies for the knowledge of God were based on two different strands in Greek metaphysics. For the Evagrian mystics, their

---

<sup>929</sup> Andrew Louth compares the concept of God in Patristic and Platonic mysticism, to question whether the 'supra-personal' and 'most ultimate' being in Plato's Idea of the Good can really be considered *theos*, or 'God'. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition : From Plato to Denys*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 188-90.

<sup>930</sup> Heidegger demonstrates how Western philosophy has similarly inherited these contrasting epistemologies. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 145-6.

Platonic dualism meant that divine truth lay in the good beyond being, while the scholastic tradition placed God as the highest being and thus reasoned through the metaphysical categories of being. The epistemological conflict was thus grounded in the ontological.

#### A Similar Epistemological Impasse

Barhebraeus' writings offer a substantive solution to the subject-object problem in the knowledge of God, i.e. the epistemological problem that has occupied the academic study of mysticism in the debate about the intentionality of consciousness in the mystical experience. The epistemological problem that is intrinsic to the study of mysticism, of how the subject knows the object of his consciousness, corresponds to Barhebraeus' own problem of the knowledge of God in the Syrian tradition. The modern impasse may thus be aligned with the conflict between scholastics and mystics in the Syrian tradition, in that these debates stem from epistemological positions that are grounded in Greek philosophy.

The understanding of reality in the Syrian scholastic tradition is achieved through rationality with logic as its tool. This reasoning is applied to super-sensory reality through a metaphysics which becomes theology, with the appropriation of Aristotle in scholastic theology. However, for the Neoplatonic mystics, true knowledge of reality is through spiritual insight, achieved by contemplation of the world of appearances towards the intuition of spiritual realities. These two distinctive approaches emerge in the two main traditions in the modern academic study of mysticism. The former approach is upheld by the neo-Kantian constructivists for whom all of human experience is constructed by the categories of perception, consequently even mystical experience of another order of reality is a product of social conditioning. The latter, Neoplatonic approach, is most clearly represented by the classical scholars of mysticism following the tradition of Schleiermacher, for whom the sense of the infinite is common to man and the source of religious feeling, with the power of intuition giving this sense of something beyond, through *a priori* knowledge. In this tradition of thinking, the existence of types of consciousness other than



ordinary consciousness becomes crucial to the understanding of the claims of the mystics that they experience another kind of reality different from the world of appearances.<sup>931</sup>

These epistemological positions in the study of mysticism have their background in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinking, particularly in regards to the influence of Schleiermacher's formulation of a theory of religion on the study of mysticism. With Schleiermacher, there was a deliberate move to formulate a rival tradition of thinking about God that was incommensurable with the Enlightenment rationalisation of religion. According to Schleiermacher, the intuition of religious feeling could not be judged according to these standards of rationality. James followed Schleiermacher in contending that religious experience can only be known by direct acquaintance and is unmediated by concepts, thus religious feeling comes prior to the concept and is 'the deeper source of religion'.<sup>932</sup> Proudfoot has contended that Schleiermacher's theory of religion as 'a matter of feeling and intuition', removes religion from the realm of rational scientific and moral inquiry.<sup>933</sup>

Consequently, it remains unscathed by Kant's contention that our experience is structured by the categories and thoughts we bring to it and thus that we produce rather than reproduce the world we think we know. As a sense that precedes and is independent of all thought, and that ought not to be confused with doctrine or practice, religion can never come into conflict with the findings of modern science or with the advance of knowledge in any realm.<sup>934</sup>

In Schleiermacher's reaction to Kant, lie the origins of the epistemological debate in the modern study of mysticism. Both sides in this debate appealed to Kant; his notion of the *a priori* was used by Otto to justify his own theory of the numinous sense,<sup>935</sup> and the

---

<sup>931</sup> Staal highlights the distinction of appearance from reality as a characteristic doctrine of the mystics, adding that the physical sciences such as physics and astronomy make similar claims. Staal, *Exploring Mysticism: A Methodological Essay*, 54-56.

<sup>932</sup> Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 7. See also James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, 431.

<sup>933</sup> Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 2.

<sup>934</sup> Ibid.

<sup>935</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 113. Otto states, 'The proof that in the numinous we have to deal with purely *a priori* cognitive elements is to be reached by introspection and a critical examination of reason such as Kant instituted.'

structuring of all consciousness by the Kantian forms and categories, is foundational for the constructivists' insistence on 'the imposition of the mediating conditions of the knower' even in the mystical experience.<sup>936</sup> In his criticism of the emphasis on religious feeling by Schleiermacher, Otto and James in the study of mysticism, Proudfoot's sympathies lie with Katz's epistemological approach. Proudfoot argues that religious consciousness cannot be both independent of thought and yet contain 'an intuitive component whose object is the infinite', since the latter assumes a cognitive element.<sup>937</sup> For Proudfoot, the intentionality of the feeling of absolute dependence includes a referential aspect for its object and thus 'it cannot be independent of thought'.<sup>938</sup> Otto comments on Schleiermacher's notion of religious feeling that despite his avoidance of a cognitive aspect, this is a mode of knowing that comes through 'the intuitive outcome of feeling', which transcends and goes beyond the empirical.<sup>939</sup> Schleiermacher's formulation of a religious consciousness is thus a response to a certain type of thinking, the Enlightenment emphasis on the rationality of empirical inquiry and scientific analysis.

There was a corresponding concern in the Syrian tradition about the application of the Greek *epistēmē* of logic to religious discourse, and the rationalisation of God, the subject of its discourse, through metaphysics. The Syrian mystics' concern with the experience of God as independent of the thinking which rationalises theological discourse, thus forms a parallel to the approach of the classical scholars. The relativist critique of the metaphysical assumptions by the classical scholars of a unified object or common reality of all mystical experience has overlooked this insight. Constructivism has interpreted the mystical experience according to the material factors open to empirical analysis, thus rationalising the mystics' discourse about God. Smart has pointed out in his article "Understanding Religious Experience" that 'the 'object' of religious experience is itself transcendent and so

---

<sup>936</sup> Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism," 59.

<sup>937</sup> Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 11.

<sup>938</sup> Ibid.

<sup>939</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 146-7.

a discussion which assimilates it to 'worldly' objects of experience is misleading.<sup>940</sup> This comment is highly pertinent to the shortcomings of the epistemological approach represented by Katz.<sup>941</sup> For Katz, the only reality of the mystical experience can be found in the social construction of the human subject and the data supplied by ordinary consciousness. In the modern debate over mysticism, the constructivists have adopted a reductionist metaphysic, whereby the experience of God is rationalised according to the explanation of cultural factors.

The constructivists' neo-Kantian epistemology imposes the mediation of all experience by the categories, without allowing for Kant's *a priori* knowledge, which is foundational for Otto's sense of the numinous.<sup>942</sup> Through Schleiermacher and Otto, religion is removed from Kant's location of God in morality, into the notion of the *a priori*, i.e. the innate sense of the religious, that has been termed the numinous, the infinite or the absolute, in order to give a universal aspect to the Christian notion of God. The opposition of the interpretation of mysticism according to intuition and the sense of the religious, with the denial of any 'given' or *a priori* by the constructivists, in their relativizing of all knowledge claimed in mystical experience, corresponds to the problem confronting Barhebraeus. He was similarly presented with an either/or conundrum. Thus, either the sense of God is intuited by the intellect as a spiritual seeing of divine reality, or the being of God is reasoned through the categories of metaphysics as the being of all beings. The debate remained at the epistemological level, in terms of what kind of knowledge was appropriate to the divine science of theology. In the modern study of mysticism the debate similarly concerns the discourse about transcendence. Either there are special states of consciousness, a sense of the wholly other through which transcendence is experienced and can be described

---

<sup>940</sup> Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," 19-20. Smart also goes on to describe briefly his notion of divine transcendence, concluding that 'God lies, as it were, along the spectrum of our experiences, and his transcendence cannot absolutely hide him away.'

<sup>941</sup> The context of Smart's comment on the transcendence of the mystical object is made, interestingly enough, in his contribution to the first of Katz's volumes, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*.

<sup>942</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 112-3. Otto quotes from the opening words of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: 'That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses?... But though all our knowledge begins *with* experience, it by no means follows that all arises *out of* experience.'

phenomenologically, or, methods of rationality may be appropriated from other disciplines, especially the social sciences and the theorisation of the social construction of reality, in the study of the mystical discourse. However, since mystic discourse is essentially a discourse about transcendence it requires a method of interpretation which does not conflict with the very subject of its discourse. Similarly Barhebraeus argued that the language of metaphysics could not be employed in a discourse that is concerned with the transcendent God, for transcendence understood as the giving of being, could not to be reduced to being.

#### Barhebraeus' Epistemological Conflict

The mystics in the Syrian tradition questioned how the experience of God could be freed from the sensory perception of the material world; for if God is constrained as the object of perception, then how could this render the infinite. They have offered an alternative mode of thinking about God that frees 'God' from the idolatry of the concept. This alternative mode of thinking was to some degree appreciated by the classical scholars of mysticism, but they tended to impose a metaphysical model on mystic discourse. In order to avoid such essentialism, the positive contribution of the mystics to this problem of conceptual idolatry will be drawn from a particular instance in the Syrian mystical tradition, the epistemological crisis identified in the discourse of Barhebraeus.

The significance of the opening of the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove* has already been discussed in some detail, where it has been argued that this informative brief autobiography does not actually present in clear terms the precise nature of the impasse which caused Barhebraeus to waver between two positions.<sup>943</sup> The complexity of Syrian intellectual tradition reflected a rich theological and philosophical tradition amongst the East and West Syrians. Syrian theology had integrated elements of the philosophy of Greeks at various stages of its development, indirectly from the Christian Platonism of the early Greek Fathers, and also through the direct translation of Greek philosophical works into Syriac from the sixth century onwards. Barhebraeus' two positions were rival epistemologies that Syrian theology inherited from Greek philosophy. The two trends can

---

<sup>943</sup> See the relevant section in Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 61, 579\*.

be broadly categorised as the scholastic and the mystic, one based on the naturalism and logic of Aristotle, the other on the idealism of Plato. At the same time, these rival epistemologies both had a common background in the Alexandrian commentary tradition of the Neoplatonic Aristotle.

When Barhebraeus spoke of his state of despair, this personal intellectual crisis reflected the larger epistemological impasse. Barhebraeus' own existential crisis concerned the wider intellectual problem of how the mind could achieve knowledge of God which was a transcendent knowledge. In other words, how the mind's apprehension of things in their being could accommodate an object transcendent to itself, without making God into another 'thing'. In order to overcome the subject-object problem in the concept of God, Barhebraeus borrowed from the Islamic tradition where comparative debates had been played out between rival traditions of thought. In his *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus objects to the predominance of logic in theological discourse, suggesting that logical reasoning has been the cause of conflict between the Christian denominations. Al-Ghazālī had similarly objected to the use of logic and metaphysics in determining matters of religion and belief, and in his autobiographical work *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, his description of his own personal crisis is so similar to Barhebraeus', that scholars have suggested that rather than a true state of crisis, the brief account in fourth part of the *Dove* is little more than a referential literary motif.<sup>944</sup> Irrespective of his actual engagement with al-Ghazālī, the epistemological nature of Barhebraeus' crisis, which reflected the impasse within the Syrian tradition, culminated in his response, which was to reconcile the two opposing positions through his mysticism of the love of God.

#### Resolving the Impasse between Rival Epistemologies

As Barhebraeus approached the conflict within the Syrian tradition, by returning to its epistemological foundations in order to clarify its causes, his approach can be paralleled in overcoming the impasse in the academic study of mysticism. In the contemporary debate

---

<sup>944</sup> This view taken by Takahashi has been discussed in a previous chapter. However, Teule considers this to have been a genuine 'existential' crisis, which befell him at the end of his life, and that al-Ghazālī's account was an example which Barhebraeus imitates in the *Book of the Dove*. Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 30.

over mystical consciousness, Forman's theory of knowledge by identity attempts to convey a non-intentional aspect to mystical experience, whereby the subject only has awareness of its state of awareness.<sup>945</sup> This is reminiscent of Schleiermacher's 'immediate self-consciousness', but with the omission of his 'whence'.<sup>946</sup> However, rather than resolving the subject-object problem in the epistemology of mystical experience, Forman's approach merely sidesteps the issue at hand, by removing any objective reference for the mystical experience altogether. Such a move disengages from the discussion of transcendence and the nature of God in the mystical experience. Forman states that there are three elements in intentional knowledge which are distinct from each other: 'the knower, the object known, and the epistemological process(es) involved in that knowing'. He then distinguishes this from 'the knowledge I have of my own consciousness', which he calls a 'knowledge by identity'.<sup>947</sup> Barhebraeus' mysticism collapses such distinctions identified as characteristic of intentional knowledge, and which maintain God as the object of knowledge. The three elements of knower, known object and the mediating epistemological process are conflated in the shift from epistemology to ontology, from the knowledge of God to the love of God. This ontological understanding of the love of God occurs through the Spirit, for the Spirit unifies subject and object through its giving of the love of God. The Spirit is not an object of knowledge external to man, but works within him and animates his spiritual nature. In this way, Barhebraeus' mysticism may extend Forman's model of 'knowledge by identity' for the mystical experience without restricting this to a sense of a consciousness that is empty of content.

For Barhebraeus, man transcends his mental and physical capacities, through realising his more hidden and essential spiritual nature, through which he perceives his own spiritual

---

<sup>945</sup> Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 726.

<sup>946</sup> These well-known expressions of Schleiermacher's appear in his later work *The Christian Faith*, as quoted by Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, 33.

<sup>947</sup> Forman, "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity," 726. 'I would call the knowledge I have of my own consciousness a "knowledge by identity" and distinguish it from intentional knowledge. In intentional knowledge three distinct elements must be involved: the knower, the object known, and the epistemological process(es) involved in that knowing. In the case of my knowledge of an external object, the object is clearly distinct from the subject. Here the sorts of complex mediating or constructing epistemological processes referred to by the constructivists are clearly involved. Even in the case of so-called self-knowledge, some aspect of the personality or ego, a disposition, or a concept of the self serves as the intentional object, and all the constructive activities of the mind come into play.'

likeness as the image of God. When the soul sees its own beauty as given by the Spirit in likeness of the Spirit, then the giving of the beautiful and the good is loved for the sake of its giving. Therefore, Barhebraeus states that truth is revealed in the beautiful, that he may come to know the unknown figure of God in spirit and truth.<sup>948</sup> Thus, the true knowledge of God is through the Spirit, rather than knowledge of an object of consciousness or from any state of consciousness. This is a 'knowledge of' what is given through revelation, which speaks of the gift of love and leaves the nature of God as the unknown. Such understanding of divine revelation is guided by the Spirit, whose truth convicts by the effective power of love that it imparts, to be reflected in a non-objectifying language - a language which does not reason about the properties of things.

The five causes of love show how 'God' is not truly known except in the 'love of God'. The phenomenon of love cannot be reduced to the perception of a beautiful object, but is integral to man's way of being. If man is predisposed to seek after the causes of things, then his love for the benefaction of his own self tends towards the source of this benefaction, which is found in the love of God that gives itself through the Spirit. Barhebraeus shows in his development of the causes of the love of God that even in the vision of the divine beauty, God is not an object of man's perception, but the notion of God is understood in man's love for what transcends his immediate possession of the beautiful and the good. Therefore, the love of God goes beyond man's own existential being, but not in the sense that 'God' is another higher being or somehow divorced from being, rather the love of God allows the mind to reach beyond metaphysical thinking towards an understanding of the self that transcends the self.

If the study of mysticism is considered from this reading of Barhebraeus' mysticism, then it is incumbent to revise the framework of its debates. Transcendence is not to be understood as an object of experience, and the debate over the perennialist or constructivist view of

---

<sup>948</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 79, 75, 593\*. 'My sun is in relation to me still in the sign of Caper only, even more to the South of Caper, and its ascension has not yet reached my horizon. And I desire and beseech that somewhat of the true light of the Beautiful One may dawn for me; in order that I may no longer adore Him that I know not, but Him, that I know in spirit and truth.'

how that experience is determined, is an arbitrary one in view of its main presupposition, that mystics have a particular experience of something. This is much too limited a view of mysticism, especially when a mystic like Barhebraeus makes philosophical claims about the originary structuring of reality. The methodological contribution of Barhebraeus' mysticism will be considered according to his view of how the language which constructs ontic reality, is a language itself constructed by a metaphysical view of reality. In order to bypass this circular reasoning, Barhebraeus shows through his own quest for the truth of revelation, the necessity of seeking after a thinking grounded in a different kind of discourse, one which is not based on the *epistēmē* of logic.

## Methodological Contributions to the Study of Mysticism

Concentrating on questions of an epistemological nature, i.e. how the mystic knows the objects of his consciousness, the academic study of mysticism has understood the claims of mystics according to the Western emphasis on the subjectivity of all knowledge. In doing so, the nature of the material for the phenomenon called 'mysticism' has been overlooked. Rather than the mystical consciousness, the academic has access to the textual account of the mystic, through which any conclusions about mysticism must be reached. Peter Moore states this point thus:

It often seems to be forgotten that the immediate data of the philosophical analysis of mysticism are not mystical experiences themselves, but the mystics' accounts of these experiences. It follows that the fruitfulness of philosophical analysis primarily depends on the extent to which these accounts render accessible to non-mystical investigation the experiences to which they refer.<sup>949</sup>

However, Moore does not take this point to its more radical conclusion, that the primary data of mysticism is the text itself. Since even philosophical analysis has no immediate access to the psychological experience of the mystic, it is the text which forms the phenomena of mysticism, and not the so-called 'mystical experience'. Historical studies of

---

<sup>949</sup> Moore, "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique," 101.



mysticism in particular, cannot begin with the mystical experience but with the text as it narrates the world of this experience. Since the academic study of mysticism has tended to concern itself with the study of the historical texts of mystics, hermeneutics would seem to offer an appropriate philosophical method for understanding these texts. The science of hermeneutics has traditionally been concerned with interpreting the meaning of texts. For Ricoeur, hermeneutics in its primary sense 'concerns the rules required for the interpretation of the written documents of our culture'.<sup>950</sup> Further, he argues that 'the human sciences may be said to be hermeneutical' in that their methodology is similar to text-interpretation, and their object conforms to those features constitutive of text.<sup>951</sup> The study of religious texts, which is the primary concern in the academic study of mysticism since its discussions concern issues which ultimately arise from the text, can thus appropriate philosophical hermeneutics to explore further the theoretical problems posed by text-interpretation.

Over and above the intentionality of mystical consciousness, the academic study of mysticism should concern itself with the interpretation of the mystics' discourse. The written text of the mystic always requires a reader to interpret its meaning, but similarly implicates a further transcendental referent, 'the world' about which the text speaks.<sup>952</sup> Ricoeur stated in his essay *The Task of Hermeneutics*, that 'the text must be unfolded, no longer towards its author but towards its immanent sense and towards the world which it opens up and discloses'.<sup>953</sup> In the modern academic study of mysticism, the immanent sense of the mystical text is identified with the mystical consciousness, in which the discourse of the mystics would seem to retreat into personal subjectivity. However, this approach neglects the invitation towards otherness made by the mystic text, by which even mystic subjectivity, as it is represented within the mystic narrative, seeks to refer to a world beyond the self. It is the 'discourse' of the mystics in the sense outlined by Certeau,<sup>954</sup>

---

<sup>950</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text," in *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 197.

<sup>951</sup> Ibid.

<sup>952</sup> Ibid., 201-2. Ricoeur states that 'the world is the ensemble of references opened up by the texts'.

<sup>953</sup> "The Task of Hermeneutics," 53.

<sup>954</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 16. Certeau also adds in a footnote (20) that by the mid-seventeenth century, "mystic" referred essentially to a use of *language* while "spirituality" referred to the *experience*.

rather than the phenomenology of mystical experience, that should form the primary object of study for the academic study of mysticism. From this discourse arises an epistemology of mystic subjectivity that is secondary to the ontological focus of mystic discourse. When the modern academic study of mysticism brackets out the truth claims of mystic discourse in the name of academic objectivity,<sup>955</sup> it subsumes the ontological claims to the epistemological. Such a move provides a paradoxical but unintended reversal of the intentionality of mystic discourse.

Mysticism may be understood as operating on three levels of discourse: primarily as that of mystical texts and practices, and secondly alongside that of the tradition by which these mystical texts continue to be interpreted and transmitted by practitioners. Finally at the third level, the academic tradition of studying mysticism may reflect on all three levels of discourse.<sup>956</sup> Rather than mysticism constituting a corpus of primary data subject to the scientific explanations of objective inquiry in the academy, both mystic discourse and the theology of mystic discourse internal to the tradition of the mystic can be used to inform this third level of academic inquiry. In his analysis of these three levels of discourse in academic inquiry, Flood has provided a model for the dialogue between these different levels, and for research in the academy to enter into a constructive and critical dialogue with its research subject.<sup>957</sup> His approach to the study of religion, which draws implicitly on the post-Heideggerian tradition of ontological hermeneutics, can thus be applied to find a way forward in the debate over the interpretation of mystical experience in the academic study of mysticism. This debate, which has reached an impasse between a phenomenological objectivism and constructivism, reflects the wider epistemological impasse between essentialism and relativism in the Western academy. Bernstein's work, on the epistemological gap that has developed between objectivism and relativism in the

---

<sup>955</sup> Flood argues that the phenomenologists of religion adopted Husserl's method of 'bracketing out' (*epoché*) for questions of religious truth, in order to proclaim the objectivity of their inquiry. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*, 95-99.

<sup>956</sup> Flood's outline of the functioning of the three levels of discourse in Religious Studies, is adapted here for the Academic Study of Mysticism. 'A third-order discourse is a form of reasoning about first- and second-order discourses and is implicitly if not explicitly comparative.' "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions," 55.

<sup>957</sup> Flood, 'Religious Studies needs to be hospitable in allowing a plurality of discourses to function within it and providing an arena for encounter between traditions that would not otherwise happen'. Ibid., 56.

academy, shows how the dialogical nature of the ontological tradition of hermeneutics can serve to reconcile these rival epistemological positions.<sup>958</sup>

Following Heidegger, ontological hermeneutics concerns the recognition of the situatedness of man in his historical consciousness, as the receiver of traditions that constitute his understanding and yet also extend themselves to him for the continuing task of reinterpretation for the present.<sup>959</sup> In this way, the tradition of the mystics is another hermeneutical tradition of interpretation, which may be allowed to contribute further to the ontological inquiry of Western hermeneutics into the anticipatory structures of understanding that define the derived epistemology of the human sciences.<sup>960</sup> With Ricoeur, hermeneutics moves from the Heideggerian concern with the foundations of understanding, that is, the subordination of epistemology to ontology, to return towards the epistemological question of the derivative status of the human sciences.<sup>961</sup> The academic inquirer of the Western institution is shaped by the development of conceptual categories and debates that have determined historical consciousness. Therefore, research must take into account the situated nature of the inquirer, necessitating a dialogical encounter between the interpreter and the historical text that is subject to interpretation, in order to allow the 'matter of the text' to speak.<sup>962</sup> Research into mysticism should theorise about mysticism as a critical reflection on themes which are reasoned and conditioned by the interpretation of the mystical texts themselves. This would allow mystic discourse to inform and even revise the preconceptions of the Western study of mysticism about the nature of its object of study and further shape the method of interpretation adopted within that academic discipline.

---

<sup>958</sup> See 'Part One – Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: An Overview'. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, 1-49.

<sup>959</sup> Hans Georg Gadamer, Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., Continuum Impacts (London: Continuum, 2004), 282-83. See (i) 'The Rehabilitation of Authority and Tradition'.

<sup>960</sup> Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 88-89.

<sup>961</sup> "The Task of Hermeneutics," 59.

<sup>962</sup> "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," 90.

## The Path to Thinking

In his monograph, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, John D. Caputo suggests that for Heidegger, the thinking that lies beyond philosophy is akin to that of poetry and mysticism.<sup>963</sup> Indeed when Heidegger categorises the history of Western philosophy as metaphysics in his *Letter on Humanism*, he is then moved to insist on the need for 'thought' aside from this kind of philosophising.<sup>964</sup> In his essay *What is Philosophy?* Heidegger argues that the history of Western philosophy amounts to Western rationality, what Caputo calls, 'a matter of supplying reasons and argumentation, of entering the forum of rational debate'.<sup>965</sup> This is the sphere of 'the Principle of Sufficient Reason', by which 'it is necessary to provide "reasons" for every "proposition"'.<sup>966</sup> Caputo has maintained that instead of posing a new definitive rationale of things in line with all the other major philosophers of the Western tradition, Heidegger departs from this sphere to reasoning 'in order to take up a non-conceptual, non-discursive, non-representational kind of "thinking"', a thinking which is detached from traditional philosophy.<sup>967</sup>

In the 'Postscript' to *What is Metaphysics?*, Heidegger considers 'representational thinking' (*vorstellendes Denken*) as the 'attempt to calculate and count up beings, to reckon upon the possible uses to which they can be put'.<sup>968</sup> However, Caputo suggests that what he proposes here as 'essential thinking' (*wesentliches Denken*), depends for its object 'not on beings but on the truth of Being itself'.<sup>969</sup> Caputo envisages the task of Heidegger's thinking as going beyond the 'manipulation of beings' and the emphasis on the 'will-fulness' of beings by which Nietzsche characterised Western metaphysics, towards a meditation on Being.<sup>970</sup> Heidegger's emphasis on the detachment of reflective thinking constitutes an attempt to

---

<sup>963</sup> John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, Rev. reprint. ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>964</sup> This reference follows Caputo's quotation of Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*. Ibid., 4.

<sup>965</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>966</sup> Ibid. Of the metaphysical foundations of philosophy for Heidegger, Caputo states with reference to *What is Philosophy?*: 'Philosophy in this sense is man's attempt to think beings in their common properties, to isolate the "Beingness" (*Seiendheit*) of beings, their most general features, such as *idea* (Plato) and *energeia* (Aristotle). Now "thought" has become "philosophy".'

<sup>967</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>968</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>969</sup> Ibid.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid., 24.

retrieve an aspect of being that has been lost in representational thinking. Indeed Heidegger's call to 'thinking' in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* is also a call for the contemplative thinking of meditation.<sup>971</sup> In the *Discourse on Thinking* he makes a plea for man to reverse his state of being in '*flight from thinking*',<sup>972</sup> claiming that man is essentially 'a *thinking*, that is, a *meditating* being'.<sup>973</sup> Heidegger insists on the relevance of 'the path of meditative thinking', especially in the modern technological age, a path which anyone can follow 'in his own manner and within his own limits', to think on what concerns him.<sup>974</sup> The meditative thinking of spirit and reason is 'at the core' of man's being and through which he contemplates the meaning of everything that is.<sup>975</sup>

Caputo suggests that for Heidegger, philosophy and mysticism 'belong together', just as they did in the medieval world-view, and that rather than oppose a philosophical rationalism to a mystical irrationalism, Heidegger saw a kind of thinking that was detached from the extremes of rationalism and irrationalism.<sup>976</sup> Further, Caputo argues that Eckhart's effecting of 'a breakthrough beyond the scholastic metaphysics of his day', forms both a structural and historical connection to Heidegger's critique of metaphysics from its emergence in medieval scholasticism to its shaping of modern ontology.<sup>977</sup> In evaluating the role of Western mysticism in the later Heidegger's thought, it may be considered what further contribution can be made by mystic traditions to the path of thinking beyond metaphysics outlined in Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics. Indeed, Heidegger's 1964 essay, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, ends ambiguously on the nature of this path to post-metaphysical thinking. He states only that there is perhaps 'a thinking outside of the distinction of rational and irrational', but that 'an education in thinking' to

---

<sup>971</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *Basic Writings from "Being and Time" (1927) to "the Task of Thinking" (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 1993), 449.

<sup>972</sup> *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of 'Gelassenheit'* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 45.

<sup>973</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>974</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>975</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46. 'Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning of which reigns in everything that is.

<sup>976</sup> Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, 7.

<sup>977</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

determine how not to think according to a ground of rationality is still required.<sup>978</sup> Here, the mysticism of Barhebraeus offers a meditation on a similar problem in terms of how to think and form a discourse about God without the reasoning of Greek philosophy.

In the Syrian tradition, there was a similar relation of scholasticism to mysticism, in which the thinking of mysticism and scholasticism both belonged to the Neoplatonic Aristotelian tradition. Each took their position according to these epistemological foundations. However, rather than accept the antipathy of these positions, Barhebraeus effected his own 'breakthrough' in critiquing the onto-theology of scholastic metaphysics. In examining the shared foundations of these rival epistemologies, he found a resolution to their divergent approaches to the knowledge of God. His resolution of this impasse also offers a contribution to the ontological tradition of Western hermeneutics following Heidegger and Gadamer. Indeed rather than distinguishing mysticism as irrational, mystical thought may be understood as a type of post-metaphysical thinking which can contribute to philosophy. Such an understanding of mysticism would allow mystic discourse to emerge as a 'mode of thinking', and as such can contribute to overcoming the dominance of metaphysical thinking that Heidegger identified in the modern scientific age of technology.<sup>979</sup>

Mystical thought has two clear instances where it can be brought into dialogue with the path to Heidegger's reflection on being. The first relates to Heidegger's call for a meditative or essential thinking, in contrast to the representational thinking of the modern ontology of the sciences. The second instance concerns the development of Heidegger's overcoming of philosophy as metaphysics; his suggestion that with this end, there must be a thinking which moves beyond the distinction of the rational and the irrational. This leads to a post-metaphysical discourse which requires a different kind of language to a reasoning which seeks to ground things in the principle of sufficient reason. Heidegger pointed to poetic

---

<sup>978</sup> Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 449. With reference to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Heidegger states: 'For it is not yet decided in what way that which needs no proof in order to become accessible to thinking is to be experienced.'

<sup>979</sup> Marion, "The 'End of Metaphysics' as a Possibility," 174. In response to Heidegger, Marion asks, 'Would overcoming metaphysics then mean overcoming the *mode of thinking* that has predominated to the point of imperialism – the imperialism of representation, armed with the power of ordering and mathematical calculation?' [Italics mine].

language, but the mystics of the Western tradition offer another kind of discourse, which often makes use of the poetic, but is not limited to it. In the language of the mystics there is thus a seeking after things in their essential meaning, to use the metaphysical reasoning on being to go 'beyond being'. Mystic discourse in its concern with 'the beyond' is focused on the apprehension of transcendence which requires going beyond the perception of being. Barhebraeus makes the attempt to move beyond the standard metaphysical distinctions, in his understanding of how there is participation of man in the divine, which reaches beyond the concept of divine being, and towards the realisation of the love of God.<sup>980</sup>

### *Meditational Thinking and Knowledge by Revelations*

Barhebraeus shows through his mystical writings, how thought which is meditative, leads to a language which resists the objectifying nature of representational thought that uses logic as its tool. His was a concerted, critical study that synthesised all of the mystical writings at his disposal, from the East Syrians to the Greeks, rejecting certain aspects and incorporating others for the sake of refining a non-objectifying model of language. In the Syrian monastic tradition, the reflective thinking of meditation and meditative prayer forms a preparatory stage to the receiving of revelations of the Spirit. This is illustrated in the fourth part of the *Book of the Dove*, when Barhebraeus describes the sentences as part of what was revealed to him in a 'flash of lightning'.<sup>981</sup> The receiving of revelations is understood as the illumination of the mind by the Spirit. This stage of illumination cannot be equated with *theōria*, understood alternatively as the Platonic intuition of the Greek philosophers and the monastic contemplation of the Syrian solitaries, but is a stage which comes subsequently to this. Barhebraeus also refers to the 'prophetic' knowledge of the perfect, like the wisdom of the prophets, which is received from the Spirit in the solitude of the cell rather than learnt in the formal study of books.<sup>982</sup> In the *Book of the Dove*, he makes a distinction between the knowledge of the solitaries and the knowledge of the perfect,

---

<sup>980</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentences 73-75, 74-75, 592-93\*.

<sup>981</sup> Ibid., 62, 579\*.

<sup>982</sup> Ibid., Sentences 50-51, 70, 589\*. '50. The knowledge of the perfect is founded on revelations. All revealed knowledge is of a prophetic nature. 51. The knowledge of the perfect is of a prophetic nature. And no part of prophetic knowledge can be learned and acquired by reading the Scriptures.'

indicating that there are clearly two distinct stages, first of contemplation and second of illumination.<sup>983</sup>

Meditational thinking leads to longing after the Beloved and reaching towards the unknown, the darkness of the cloud which veils the sight of the Beautiful one from human grasp, and thus ultimately not to the acquirement of knowledge for its own sake. The opening sentence of the *centuria* on the inquiry into knowledge by the pure soul, describes the divine cloud in terms of this unknowing in the hiddenness of God.

1. The pure soul inquires into knowledge, not for the sake of glory by which the knowing acquire in the world, but that its longing after the face of the Lord of the universe may be augmented, and that it may be able to enter and to be hidden within the divine cloud.<sup>984</sup>

Therefore the longing of the pure soul leads towards the divine cloud, in which knowing and seeing do not occur in the representative sense. Thus the vision and knowledge of God that is attained in the cloud is described as 'without visible vision and knowable knowledge'.<sup>985</sup> The cloud is the place where God's wisdom can be attained directly and fully, 'without the intermediary of complicated deliberations'.<sup>986</sup> Meditational thought thus precedes the knowledge by revelations, understood as the non-representational knowledge received in the divine cloud. It requires preparation of the body and soul ready for their animation by the spirit of love, by which this knowledge is received. Indeed, towards the end of the sentences, Barhebraeus recognises that the reader may not have reached the state to which the text of the *Dove* has been guiding him, the state of longing to see through

---

<sup>983</sup> Ibid., Sentence 98, 80, 598\*. 'Now these sentences are only profitable for him who is trained in the knowledge of divine and human practice, longing to see in revelations those things which his speculation has reached...'

<sup>984</sup> Ibid., Sentence 1, 62, 579-580\*.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid., 103, 491-92\*. Section 11: On Consolation in God and Freedom of Speech with Him: 'The joy and the gladness which happen to the Initiated on account of the multitude of divine revelations and the frequency of spiritual visions, is called consolation in God. When this consolation has taken hold of the enviable, the friend of God, he is only content with quiet solitude and he cannot bear even the sound of a leaf. Such solitude is called by the teachers a solitude which makes gods; for through it the mind acquires complete unification and perfect mingling with God, and vision and knowledge of Him, whose glory is exalted over the world, without visible vision and without knowable knowledge.'

<sup>986</sup> Ibid., Sentence 12, 64, 581\*.



revelations.<sup>987</sup> For this, the reader is advised to return to his meditation on the text of the *Book of the Dove*, in order that its words might 'warm' his heart, that is, to enflame it with the love of the Beautiful Good.<sup>988</sup>

It remains to be considered to what extent 'knowledge by revelations' can be used as a category of thought for the Heideggerian tradition of ontological hermeneutics. The interpretation of the texts of the mystics represents the possibility for a retrieval of a tradition of thinking about God beyond the dominant metaphysical tradition of thinking through being. The Syrian mystical tradition can be aligned with the overcoming of metaphysics in the West; for the latter tradition, metaphysics has exhausted all of its possibilities according to Heidegger,<sup>989</sup> while for the former, metaphysics as such was very much an imported discipline, especially in its decisive development in the Arabic-Avicennan tradition. Heidegger's point that the history of Western philosophy is the history of metaphysics holds as true for the Syrian reception of Greek philosophy, especially in terms of the metaphysical implications that Greek philosophy had for the Syrians in their dependence on logic. In Barhebraeus' inspired sentences, mathematical logic is by implication 'elementary knowledge', that is without necessity once the mind has penetrated the divine cloud.<sup>990</sup> For the divine cloud demarcates 'the place without place, the world without denomination, the nature without beginning',<sup>991</sup> and thus the kind of reasoning which depends on the categories, the terms of the proposition, causes and first principles, becomes irrelevant here. The cloud marks an internal point of departure, from the syllogistic form of reasoning that enslaves man within the categories of time and place,

---

<sup>987</sup> Ibid., Sentence 98, 80, 598\*. 'But who is devoid of this longing, shall reiterate his meditation upon this book; with attentive intelligence however, not by brutish recitation; perhaps in this way it will make warm his heart.'

<sup>988</sup> Wensinck translates the Syriac for the Beautiful Good as 'the Beautiful One'. Ibid., Sentence 99, 80-81, 598\*. '99. The causes which abate the love unto the Beautiful one are many. To enumerate all of them is above my power and too lengthy for my time.'

<sup>989</sup> Marion discusses this repeated assertion of Heidegger's, in his article. Marion, "The 'End of Metaphysics' as a Possibility," 167-68.

<sup>990</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 64, 582\*.

<sup>991</sup> Ibid., 116, 505\*.

to the recognition of his own beauty through seeing in himself the divine image, and by which he recognises the Beautiful.<sup>992</sup>

### Language and Metaphysical Thought

The mysticism of Barhebraeus makes a contribution to the Western tradition of ontological hermeneutics, in terms of its meditation on the relation of language and thought. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer refers to language as the 'horizon' of ontological hermeneutics, as the 'medium' of the hermeneutic experience of the world.<sup>993</sup> Hence, he postulates that 'man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic'.<sup>994</sup> Despite what he calls 'the universality of our linguistically mediated experience of the world', he recognises the challenge of American relativism that 'none can escape that particular image and that particular schematization with which he is imprisoned'.<sup>995</sup> However, Gadamer insists that:

the possibility of going beyond our conventions and beyond all experiences that are schematized in advance opens up before us once we find ourselves, in our conversation with others, faced with opposed thinkers, with new critical tests, with new experiences.<sup>996</sup>

Therefore his insistence on the universality of language despite the critique from relativism and ideology is based on the hermeneutic experience of the world, which is dialogical in the sense of being always in conversation with the other, a dialogism which allows for its preconceived notions to be open to correction by the experience of the other. The question then turns to how the dialogical nature of hermeneutics might allow for other notions of thinking about man's relation to the world through language, and might contribute to widening its understanding of these relations.

---

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., Sentence 95, 79, 597\*. '95. When you wish to give rest to your mind from attaining profound questions by syllogistic intricacies, and you will acquire solitude and silence with steady labours, then be patient, and be not dejected on your way. Ere long your sun will rise and illuminate your evening and show you your beauty and liberate you from the slavery of time and place.'

<sup>993</sup> See Part III 'The Ontological Shift of Hermeneutics Guided by Language', Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* – for example in Chapter 5, the first section 'Language as the medium of the hermeneutic experience'.

<sup>994</sup> Gadamer, Weinsheimer, and Marshall, *Truth and Method*, 440.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid., 548-9.

<sup>996</sup> Ibid., 550-51.

Heidegger has demonstrated the metaphysical foundations of language, or the thinking of *logos*, in Western philosophy. The mystic tradition is another tradition besides that of ontological hermeneutics that forms a critique of these metaphysical foundations in language and thought, and the extent to which the two are mutually implicated. Caputo has pointed out that Heidegger draws precisely on the language of the 'poets, mystics, and mystic-poets', in order to create a language which overcomes the limits of the philosophical, through a 'post-metaphysical language'.<sup>997</sup> To what extent then can this attempt by the later-Heidegger be taken forward, in continuing this dialogue with the mystics, to bring the insights of mystic discourse into the discussion of the possibilities for a post-metaphysical language that would allow for reflective thinking? In other words, if Western philosophy has imposed certain constraints on the thinking that occurs through language, then the tradition of the Western mystics may be seen as a reaction to the philosophical limits of this language. In the prior discussion of ineffability and mysticism, it has often been asserted that ineffability is characteristic of the mystical experience. Wittgenstein is often quoted to the effect that the mystical lies beyond the limits of philosophical language, and to which the appropriate response is silence.<sup>998</sup> However, the mystic tradition does not simply retreat into silent protest about such limits as might be expected from the claim of ineffability. Instead, mystics transcribe into written texts a spoken discourse that is adequate to what cannot be expressed by the metaphysical and which is ineffable within such points of reference.

The Syrian mystic tradition offers a further understanding of man's hermeneutical experience of the world through the medium of language. This tradition distinguishes between the rational word which concerns the relation of man to the corporeal world, a world interpreted in language, and the intuition of the essence of spiritual things by the mystics, a realm which comes prior to language. In this vein, Barhebraeus writes of words and names as necessary for reference to corporeal things (*gšīme*), but not for the non-

---

<sup>997</sup> Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*, 260.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid. Caputo refers here to Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, No. 4.114-5. Caputo contrasts the conclusions of Kant and Wittgenstein with Heidegger's attempts to go beyond the limits of philosophical discourse.

corporeal (*lā gšīme*); thus language is a secondary thing.<sup>999</sup> If language is tied to the being of things in the Neoplatonic tradition of Aristotle, then the rational word coincides with metaphysical thinking. However, prior to thinking of the rational through *meltā* (Gr. *logos*), comes the Spirit or *rūḥā* which gives both word and life to rational sentient beings. For Syrian monks to seek life in the spirit rather than in the rational, the discipline of silence and the solitude of the cell becomes a necessity. Yet, Barhebraeus does not insist that the highest stage of the mystic is an ineffable one receding into silence, but rather advocates that the seeking and finding of the spirit institutes another kind of discourse. In the sentences, he declares that '[e]ssential seeking is turning the gaze wholly towards the sought',<sup>1000</sup> for the Spirit is not metaphysically present in language but inspires language in its aspiration towards 'the beloved'. This mysterious discourse relies on speaking through the words of the Spirit, a discourse which speaks the language of love by which the spirit gives, rather than that of a propositional language. Barhebraeus ends the book of love in the *Ethikon* by quoting an anonymous saying on writing the mysteries of the Spirit, whereby the words of the Spirit 'mix' into the words of the writer; a claim that he equally makes for his own writing.<sup>1001</sup>

It is this spiritual power, designated by the 'sweetness' of the words of the Spirit that inspires those who hear its words with its authority; for this is an authority that is recognised by the Initiated through their having already 'tasted' (personally experienced) the 'sweetness' of the love of God in the Spirit.<sup>1002</sup> The words 'designated' by the Spirit are

---

<sup>999</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 76, 75, 593\*.

<sup>1000</sup> Ibid., Sentence 23, 65-66, 583-84\*. '23. Love is the lover's seeking after the beloved. Essential seeking is turning the gaze wholly towards the sought. And then seeking and finding will become twins, viz. finding will follow seeking immediately. He who seeks thus, finds; who asks thus, receives.'

<sup>1001</sup> Ibid., 116-17, 506\*. 'It has further been said: If anyone writes the mysteries of the spirit, without the spirit's dictating them to him, it will not mix its sweetness into his words and therefore they will not be loved by those who read them nor give delight to those who hear them. But if anyone learns the mysteries of the spirit from the spirit, writing what it dictates to him, then the spirit will mix itself into all his words and all those who hear him will smell its odours and their hearts will be filled by these words with life and their sound will eradicate the passions from them. And this is the pen of the ready writer with which he writes his holy book.'

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid., Sentence 53, 71, 589\*. 'Who has not tasted the sweetness of the love of his Lord, cannot discern the power of the words of the Beloved, because they are of a designating nature. And spiritual words cannot be uttered but in mysterious designations.'

thus a form of speech or discourse (*mamllā*),<sup>1003</sup> which is then transferred into written discourse to be read or heard by an audience who can appreciate its spiritual power.<sup>1004</sup> The written discourse of the mystic thus occurs through the dictation of the Spirit; a process of dictation which is also one of composition,<sup>1005</sup> with the word of the spirit brought to life in the writing of the text. The mystic author is inspired within the process of writing, rather than his inspiration being an event prior to his writing. The relation is thus not between the primary ineffable experience and the secondary textual account of the mystic, but the very act of writing is a spiritual activity, through which the spirit dictates its word to the writer. Barhebraeus states that in writing the ‘mysteries of the spirit’, the Spirit dictates the mystic’s words, for this is what sanctifies his writing.<sup>1006</sup> The mysteries of the Spirit once transferred into the text, work a second inspiration in inspiring love in those who read them, and thus the mysterious nature of the Spirit, the secret which lies hidden, is that of the love of God which is the ‘mystery’ (Syr. *rāzā*) revealed to those who are ready to listen.

### *Thinking Language through Grammar*

In Barhebraeus’ thinking about language, there is a progression from the thinking of language that is tied to the grammatical understanding of the Greeks, towards an awareness of the problematic of reducing language to the logical analysis of its structural components in grammar. This development in Barhebraeus’ understanding is implied in his mystical understanding of the language that is given or ‘dictated’ by the Spirit. An understanding of language that is based entirely on Greek grammar carries over the problem of thinking God through metaphysics into the structuring of the discourse that

---

<sup>1003</sup> Payne-Smith gives two primary meanings for *mamllā*: i) speech, diction, ii) talk, discourse. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 279.

<sup>1004</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 55, 71, 589\*. ‘55. Who learns the mysteries of the spirit from the spirit, his audience will gather all enjoyments from his words; and his utterances will eradicate all passions from their hearts.’

<sup>1005</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 121. Certeau points out that dictation was a medieval scholastic art (*ars dictandi*), an art of composition which became associated with rhetoric, involving transference from ‘oral to written expression’, and was a manner, a *modus*, of speaking, that became significant for mystic discourse.

<sup>1006</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 54, 71, 589\*. ‘54. Who writes the mysteries of the spirit, without the spirit’s dictating them to him, is a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, because the spirit does not mix its sweetness into his words.’

speaks about God. In order to free 'God' from the concept of being, Barhebraeus sought a language that was appropriate to this task, a non-metaphysical language which would allow theological discourse to speak about transcendence without resorting to logical propositions about the divine nature. These insights correspond to those of Heidegger, who formed a critique of 'onto-theological' discourse stemming from the medieval scholasticism of the Latin West, in which the divine became the highest being of Aristotelian metaphysics. Heidegger has shown how the thinking of the Greeks has regulated language through the 'technical instruments' of logic and grammar.<sup>1007</sup>

The more specific intention of the mystics, in discerning man's relation to God, can make a further contribution to ontological hermeneutics in the development of a post-metaphysical thinking about transcendence. Barhebraeus' aim was to adopt a mode of discourse that would allow the divine word to continue speaking, rather than to reason about divine being in the abstract. In the Syrian mystic tradition, Barhebraeus found a mode of discourse that was conducted through the understanding of God as Spirit; this 'spiritual' understanding was itself mediated by the Spirit in the very manner of its knowing, giving an authority to its language that did not depend on classical logic. The emphasis on the given-ness of language by the Spirit in the monastic spiritual tradition is thus quite detached from the scholastic mode of reading and discussion in the schools of Greek learning that interpreted language through the logical categorisation of the utterance. For students of scholastic learning at a West Syrian monastery like Qennešre, the Syriac language came to be analysed through Greek logic (*mlilūtā*) with some adaptations. Since the *Organon* had received most attention by the Syrian translators, the reception of Greek philosophy was predominantly that of its logic.<sup>1008</sup> Indeed in terms of the analysis of grammar, Aristotelian logic had to be modified in various ways to be accommodated within the Semitic language system to which Syriac belonged; thus the copula functioned rather

---

<sup>1007</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 56. Heidegger states 'that these grammatical forms have not dissected and regulated language as such since eternity like an absolute, that instead, they grew out of a very definite interpretation of the Greek and Latin language'.

<sup>1008</sup> Daniel King notes that in the Peripatetic tradition of the Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle, following Porphyry the *Organon* came to be understood as about grammar. Daniel King, "Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2013): 106-7.

differently to Greek and was often omitted altogether in Syriac.<sup>1009</sup> These modifications of Greek logic, as it was adapted in the translation process into Syriac, are evident in Barhebraeus' own works devoted to logic. Barhebraeus' summary treatise on logic, the *Book of the Pupils of the Eye*, incorporates the Alexandrian tradition of the interpretation of Aristotle's *Organon*, and thus includes the Syriac version of Porphyry's commentary, the *Isagoge*, alongside the books of the *Organon*, notably the *Categories* and *Peri Hermeneias*.<sup>1010</sup> The intrinsic connection of logic and grammar for the Greeks is similarly reflected in Barhebraeus' *Book of the Pupils of the Eye*, that is also concerned with the terms of the proposition treated in grammar. These relations can be seen in terms of how the immediate goal of logic in the Aristotelian tradition is demonstration, which occurs through its technical usage of language. In Janssens' explication of Aristotelian logic, demonstration is based on the syllogism, the syllogism is formed by propositions, and the proposition is composed of the terms of language.<sup>1011</sup>

The Greek connection of logic and grammar was deeply entrenched amongst the Syrians, evidenced in the plans of the East Syrian Patriarch Timothy I, to write a Syriac Grammar based on the models of Greek logic. Commenting on this, King thus states:

He freely used logical terminology for grammar and tried to turn the latter into a science of divisions such as we see in many logical texts of the same period. Timothy thus exemplifies an approach to grammar in which the elements of language are tied to reality in such a way that terms applicable to physics and logic are not only usable in grammar but become a necessary part of the elaboration of an effective description of a specific language.<sup>1012</sup>

---

<sup>1009</sup> Janssens comments in a footnote to section 8b in the Chapter 'About Propositions' in *Peri Hermeneias*, on the distinction between the bipartite proposition and the proposition with an additional predicate. "The significance of that distinction was lost when the Greek examples were transposed into Syriac, where the use of the copula in a nominal sentence is not the rule. Indeed, according to the Semitic viewpoint, no copula is implied in a proposition composed of subject and nominal predicate... Consequently the bipartite proposition as defined by Bar Hebraeus conforms to the usual type of the Semitic nominal proposition without copula'. Janssens, "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye," 17 n. 104.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid. Janssens published four articles with the *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* concerning Barhebraeus' summary treatise on logic; these consist of an introductory article (1930), the Syriac text itself in two parts (1931 & 1932) and the English translation of the first part (1935). The second part appears not to have been translated by Janssens into English. My comments are thereby limited to the first part of Barhebraeus' treatise on logic, which summarises the *Isagoge*, the *Categories*, and the *Peri Hermeneias*.

<sup>1011</sup> *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 20.

<sup>1012</sup> King, "Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)," 116-17.

He concludes that, although it is not known whether Timothy ever undertook such a grammar, the importance he ascribed to the Greek and Arabic grammatical traditions confirms 'the way in which the Syrian educational system conceived of the relationship between grammar and logic, or between language and thought.'<sup>1013</sup> That logic was not a universal, but a tool inherited from a particular tradition of thinking, is a perspective that was perhaps reinforced for the Syrians by the fact that their main traditions of logic, Aristotelian and Stoic, came to them from a differently structured grammatical and syntactical context to the Semitic.<sup>1014</sup> Despite the predominance of Greek thought amongst the Syrians, there was also amongst the monastics a deeply held antipathy to this learning, and it was thus between these positions that Barhebraeus mediated.<sup>1015</sup>

However, Barhebraeus appreciated the relative value of logic in that he continued to compose summaries of logic as part of larger compendiums of philosophy to the end of his life, even if it he could no longer support the idea of logic as a universal rule. In the preface to the *Book of the Pupils of the Eye*, he affirms that the cause of disagreements between men in thinking and doctrine is that reasoning does not always reach truth, and thus logic provides the authoritative instrument for directing this reasoning.

Therefore the need arises for some rule capable of directing the mind toward correct reasoning, perfecting man in theory and practice, and wherewith the mind might discriminate between what is correct and what is not, and be kept from stumbling. Such a rule is supplied by logic or dialectic, which may be called the "science of wisdom."<sup>1016</sup>

Here, Barhebraeus follows the tradition of understanding logic as the instrument of philosophy, and not another branch of the philosophical sciences. In his compendiums of

---

<sup>1013</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>1014</sup> For example, Paul the Persian incorporates both Stoic and Aristotelian models into his ten species of discourse, in the sixth century commentary entitled the *Introduction to Logic*. Ibid., 112-13.

<sup>1015</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 45, 563\*. There is anecdotal evidence of this attitude in a section concerning the 'Purity of deliberations', in which Barhebraeus quotes the following passage: 'To Aba Arsenius a certain brother said: why do you, who are wise, ask this villager, namely Aba Macarius, concerning deliberations? He answered: I know the lore of the Greeks and Romans, but the alphabet of this villager I have not yet learnt.'

<sup>1016</sup> Preface, 2a. Janssens, "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye," 2-3.



Avicennan philosophy, the *Conversation of Wisdom* and the *Cream of Wisdom*, he again follows Avicenna's lead in placing the *Organon* at the beginning, as the *prolegomena* to the other books.<sup>1017</sup> The instrument of logic can thus be used to analyse propositional discourse, and correct reasoning may be reached through logic or dialectic, implying the discursive basis of such reasoning. It is with Aristotle that 'logos as assertion becomes the locus of truth in the sense of correctness', and thus the assertion of what is either true or false, in Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*.<sup>1018</sup> Heidegger emphasises the understanding of *logos* as discourse that occurs with Aristotle, in which the *logos* becomes contained within the assertion, and thus to say something is to assert something in accordance with the categories of being.<sup>1019</sup> Aristotle's metaphysics uses logical reasoning in order to investigate the underlying order of being, so that the function of *logos* as assertion is controlled by the categories of metaphysics, and logic becomes its *organon* or instrument.

However, Barhebraeus comes to understand truth of *logos* not in this sense of the assertion of correct reasoning, but in the disclosure of what has been concealed from view, through the revelation of the Spirit into discourse. His re-interpretation of how truth is revealed in the *logos* of discourse, offers a further dimension to the concern with the foundations of understanding that has occupied ontological hermeneutics. Heidegger asserts that with Aristotle, logic becomes the tool (*organon*) for grasping truth, only to suspend 'the originary opening up of the Being of beings'. Heidegger argues for the truth (*alētheia*) that was 'originary' to the *logos*, prior to the assertion of *logos* that allowed analysis in language and the assignment of rules of 'logic' to govern its disclosure in language.<sup>1020</sup> In Barhebraeus' mystic discourse, the giving of *logos* or word (Syr. *meltā*) to man is originary to the action of the Spirit and this giving is one that inspires his approach to language,

---

<sup>1017</sup> For the structure of these works by Barhebraeus, see Janssens' Introduction to the four parts of the *Conversation of Wisdom* and Takahashi's list of the books in the six sections of the *Cream*. *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 20-22. Takahashi, "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom," 114-15.

<sup>1018</sup> Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 199. Heidegger refers to Aristotle *De Interpretatione*, Chapter 4.

<sup>1019</sup> Ibid. Heidegger argues that from Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* (chapters 5-6), 'Logos is now *legein ti kata tinos*, saying something about something. That about which something is said is in each case what lies at the basis of the assertion, what lies in front of it, *hupokeimenon* (subjectum).'

<sup>1020</sup> Ibid., 201. Heidegger continues, 'It was not without justification that the ancient philosophy of the schools collected the treatises of Aristotle that relate to logos under the title "Organon."

whereby the rational word is liberated from the control of logical analysis through grammar. Instead of logic being the instrument of knowledge, it is the spirit which guides the intellect towards all truth. Theological truth is not to be asserted through the terms of the proposition or the deductive logic of the syllogism, but it is the Spirit that gives truth and convinces by its own evidential proof, the response of love in the heart of the receiver.<sup>1021</sup> The Spirit is thus the giver of truth which is expressed in the gift of love and it is the experience of the love of God which is then transcribed into language, the mediation of being from the spirit to the word. While Heidegger's understanding of *logos* from the pre-Socratic philosophers, returns to the originary thinking of being, for Barhebraeus the meditation on being leads to the Word which is given through the Spirit, and this giving finds its primary expression in the discourse based on the love of God.

### The Spirit Speaks in the Gift

Heidegger questions at the conclusion of his essay *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*: 'What speaks in the "There is/It gives"?'<sup>1022</sup> This question is very much the point of departure for Marion, who suggests that in searching out the 'it gives' (*es gibt*) of Heidegger's assertion of being, there comes 'the possibility of accessing, on this side of (or beyond) beings, what precedes it'. In the 'it gives' there is 'a donation that arrives', but the arriving of the donation of being involves the question 'of what lets itself be given'.<sup>1023</sup> Marion argues against Heidegger, to say that the overcoming of metaphysics leads to 'the horizon of donation', for Being arises in donation through the giving which 'can never appear as something given since it exhausts and accomplishes itself in allowing to appear'.<sup>1024</sup> It is in the dimension of giving and the gift that representational thinking can be surpassed and philosophy can free itself from metaphysics.<sup>1025</sup> Marion extends the

---

<sup>1021</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentence 90, 78, 596\*. '90. Accustom your soul to believe what you hear from the true one. And if you recognize not His true essence, do not search after His cause with syllogisms...'

<sup>1022</sup> Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," 449. Heidegger then concludes the essay by stating, 'The task of thinking would then be the surrender of previous thinking to the determination of the matter for thinking.'

<sup>1023</sup> Marion, "The "End of Metaphysics" as a Possibility," 177.

<sup>1024</sup> Ibid., 181-82.

<sup>1025</sup> Ibid., 182-83.

Heideggerian tradition of ontological hermeneutics, in seeking a way forward in ‘the question of a non-metaphysical thinking’, which he suggests requires a philosophical thinking that reaches ‘perhaps even beyond the question of being’.<sup>1026</sup> In his theological work, *God Without Being*, Marion develops his thinking about donation through the understanding of the God of Christian revelation, advocating that through liberating the gift, Charity ‘delivers’ the ontological difference of Being/being.<sup>1027</sup> Marion argues that Charity, the Christian love of *agapē*, in fact forms the appropriate and most essential name of God in *1John* 4:8, precisely because love allows God to be thought under ‘the figure of the unthinkable’.<sup>1028</sup> Further Marion explains that ‘Love does not suffer from the unthinkable or from the absence of conditions, but is reinforced by them’. Thus for God to love and to be understood as *agapē*, places no restriction or limit on ‘his initiative, amplitude, and ecstasy’.<sup>1029</sup>

Barhebraeus presents the primacy of love in a different manner to the post-metaphysical tradition of Marion, for the basis of his presentation of love is not the assertion of *1John* 4:8, that ‘God is Love’, that is fundamental to Marion’s theological discourse of Charity.<sup>1030</sup> Rather, Barhebraeus’ discourse rests on the verse of *John* 4:24, that ‘God is spirit’ and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth.<sup>1031</sup> This is indicative of the monastic spiritual tradition, for in the *Dove*, Barhebraeus gives this teaching in the words of an anonymous master to his disciple.<sup>1032</sup> He presents the essential revelation of God as the giving of the Spirit in love,

---

<sup>1026</sup> Ibid., 183-4.

<sup>1027</sup> *God without Being : Hors-Texte*, 102. ‘The gift, in liberating Being/being, in liberating being from Being, is itself finally liberated from ontological difference – not only the sending, not only the distortion, but the freeing of the first instance, charity. For the gift itself is liberated only in its exertion starting from and in the name of that which, greater than it, comes behind it, that which gives and expresses itself as gift, charity itself. Charity delivers Being/being.’

<sup>1028</sup> Ibid., 46-7. In contrast to Heidegger who maintains love only ‘in a derived and secondary state’, according to Marion.

<sup>1029</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>1030</sup> See Marion’s discussion of the primacy given to love by Pseudo-Dionysius, which was reversed in Thomas Aquinas’ onto-theological focus on *Exodus* 3:14. Ibid., 73-83.

<sup>1031</sup> For example, on prayer in Spirit and in truth see Section 7 on Pure Prayer. Teule, *Ethicon : Mēmra I*, 17. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 119, 60\*. Book 1, Chapter 5: On Music: ‘it is becoming for us to worship God in spirit and truth and in holy silence, of which sanctifications are stronger than all voices’.

<sup>1032</sup> *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 32, 550\*. ‘For God is spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.’

and thus it is the love of God that constitutes this worshipping and knowing God in spirit and truth. From this understanding, Barhebraeus develops two derivative notions. Firstly, God as Spirit gives in love, a giving which begins outside of space and time, and thus the gift cannot be understood through the incarnation of the Word that is only thought metaphysically in the Christologies of substance, nature and person.<sup>1033</sup> Secondly, for God to be worshipped as 'Spirit' rather than as 'Word', language becomes problematized in the worship of God in prayer. Thus, for human language to be adequate to the worship which is true in spirit, it must be directly inspired by the Spirit.

### *The Giving of the Spirit*

In his own emphasis on the spirit, Barhebraeus retrieves a particularly Syrian tradition of reverence for the Holy Spirit, and this can be seen in the Syrian poetic homilies (*memrē*) and hymns of St Ephrem.<sup>1034</sup> In these works, the spirit is understood as the most hidden part of man; when the soul ascends to the beauty of the spirit, man becomes the 'likeness' of God's majesty.<sup>1035</sup> Barhebraeus' mysticism of the giving of the spirit in love draws on this early theological tradition of St Ephrem.<sup>1036</sup> Furthermore, he attempted to bring together the opposed trends of scholastic intellectualism and Evagrian mysticism - both of which relied on a Neoplatonic Aristotelian tradition of epistemology through metaphysics - in returning to another, shared tradition of theological understanding, centred on the spirit. Barhebraeus not only revives and retrieves the centrality of the spirit in the Syrian

---

<sup>1033</sup> In Part IV of the *Dove*, Barhebraeus prefers the ascription 'bilateral likeness' for Christ's humanity and divinity, and relativizes the formulations of different denominations according to this common confession. *Ibid.*, 60, 578\*.

<sup>1034</sup> See for example the numerous publications of Sebastian Brock on St Ephrem. Sebastian P. Brock, *The Harp of the Spirit : Twelve Poems of Saint Ephrem*, Studies Supplementary to Sobornost (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1975). *The Luminous Eye : The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Cistercian Studies Series (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992).

<sup>1035</sup> See for example Brock's translation of Hymn IX.20, in Ephraem, *Hymns on Paradise*, 143.

'Far more glorious than the body/ is the soul,  
And more glorious still than the soul/ is the spirit,  
but more hidden than the spirit/ is the Godhead.  
At the end/ the body will put on/ the beauty of the soul,  
The soul will put on that of the spirit,  
While the spirit shall put on/ the very likeness of God's majesty.'

<sup>1036</sup> Barhebraeus refers to the early Syrian poetic tradition in his chapter on music (Book 1, Chapter V.4), which begins with recognising Mar Ephraim for his composition of holy songs and homilies. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 124, 65\*.

tradition, but also extends this central role of the spirit as an animating element to the mind and body.

The spiritual (*rūḥānāyā*) dimension of man is understood as derivative from the Spirit (*rūḥā*) of God.<sup>1037</sup> Thus rather than the distinction of man's being from the First (divine) Being of metaphysics, Syrian mystic discourse emphasises the spirit of man derived from the Holy Spirit. However, this latter relation is not merely one of causation, though the Spirit is called the 'cause of all causes'; the Spirit has a life-giving force which maintains and animates the life of all living things.<sup>1038</sup> The language of the Spirit does not employ *logos* as the logic of the assertion, but has an affective power that may be heard by those who come to hear its speech through meditative thinking.<sup>1039</sup> In the *Dove*, Barhebraeus talks of the meditative aspect of the monk's solitary asceticism in the cell. Here, meditation contains three elements, the first concerns the recognition of sin, the second the meditation on God's justice in order to acquire the fear of God in the heart, and the third on the abundance of God's goodness and mercy. This third element is quoted here in full:

The third, that one meditates upon the effusions of God's mercy and the goods promised to the good; then thanksgivings will be multiplied in his mouth and his thoughts will be made to abide in the spiritual world and he will have spiritual intercourse with the Angels of light and the souls of the just.<sup>1040</sup>

When meditative thought is given towards the effusions of God's 'mercy' (*rāḥmā*) a merciful love that overflows with goodness, this produces words of thanksgiving. Meditative thinking is thus a spiritual thinking that occurs through the spiritual (*rūḥānāyā*) element in man, and leads to the 'spiritual intercourse' (*rūḥānāyata māta'nā*) in the spiritual world.<sup>1041</sup> Meditative thinking is thus a filling of the mind with the abundance or

---

<sup>1037</sup> This presupposition draws on the Syrian poetic tradition of St Ephrem. In the *Hymns on Paradise*, Sebastian Brock notes in regards to Hymn IX (which is quoted from, below) that 'one should recall that in Syriac the term *rūḥā* means both "wind" and "spirit"/"Spirit"'. Ephraem, *Hymns on Paradise*, 135.

<sup>1038</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 4, 523\*.

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid. 'Her speech touches every ear, but few hear her voice. She calls every man by his name, but one of a thousand answers her.'

<sup>1040</sup> Ibid., 23, 541\*.

<sup>1041</sup> The nature of this 'spiritual intercourse' is also intimated by Barhebraeus when he outlines the aim of the psychic duties of the cell, which consists 'in expecting from the Lord the gift of the illumination of the mind

‘effusions’ of God’s merciful love, the giving for its own sake, which is described by Barhebraeus using the verb ‘to pour out’ (*špa*), like a river which overflows its banks.<sup>1042</sup> Meditation on the gift of love leads to the thinking of the origination of this giving, through the Spirit that gives life. Barhebraeus calls the Spirit itself ‘Life’ and further says that ‘Life however reveals itself in the living as long as it lives’;<sup>1043</sup> the Spirit therefore reveals itself in the living as the love of God. This association of the Spirit with the life of the living can also be identified as the spirit in man, from which derives his innate spiritual affinity with God as Spirit and the fifth cause of the love of God.<sup>1044</sup>

### *The Discourse of the Spirit*

For Barhebraeus, the truth that was ‘originary’<sup>1045</sup> to the *logos* is that of the word as the gift of the Spirit. By the Spirit reason is given to the rational, but this primary giving is neglected in the emphasis on Aristotle’s definition of man as the rational animal. Reason is but one of the gifts of the spirit, but has become dominant over man’s being and his relation to the world, to the extent that ‘God’ has become an extension of man’s reason. This reasoning was dominated by the classical logic of Aristotle and became enshrined in the Christology of the Church Fathers. In order to recover the Word from its confinement in the assertion of being, Barhebraeus developed his discourse of the Spirit. This discourse was represented in the *Apophthegmata*, the ‘sayings’ of the Egyptian Fathers,<sup>1046</sup> and was maintained in the utterances of the Syrian mystics following the transmission of this tradition in Evagrian monasticism. By reason of this historic background, much of the

---

and the aptitude to behold the spiritual things in their nature and to have communion with them’. Ibid., 19, 537\*.

<sup>1042</sup> See Payne-Smith’s dictionary entry for the Syriac word *špa*: ‘to pour forth, overflow, run over, rise (as a river in a flood); to abound’. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 591-92.

<sup>1043</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, Sentences 30-31, 67, 585\*.

<sup>1044</sup> Ibid., 91, 480\*. ‘The fifth cause that of a hidden consanguinity and a secret likeness between God and mankind, is found to be a more intrinsic one, as is justified by the divine word, which shows man to have been created in the image of God.’

<sup>1045</sup> This is Heidegger’s term; Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 155. ‘The originary remains originary only if it has the constant possibility of being what it is: origin as springing forth (*Ursprung als Entspringen*) [from the concealment of the essence].’

<sup>1046</sup> Budge, *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers : Being Histories of the Anchorites, Recluses, Monks, Coenobites, and Ascetic Fathers of the Deserts of Egypt between A.D. CCL and A.D. CCCC circiter*. Volume II contains the Syriac version of the *Apophthegmata*.

material in the *Dove* and the *Ethicon* resembles a collection of quotations. This, rather than an encyclopaedic endeavour, is a deliberate strategy on the part of Barhebraeus in an attempt to retain the quality of the utterance in the primary giving of the Spirit into language. What is said about the Spirit must retain the primary nature of its being given by the Spirit, in order to pre-empt its devolution into the *logos* of the assertion, the saying of something in accordance with the propositional thought of being. Certeau has pronounced that there is an attempt by Western mystics to return the 'said' into the voice of the 'saying'.<sup>1047</sup> Mystic discourse for Certeau, allows the Spirit to speak again in the mystics' texts, 'in the very place at which the Speaker speaks'.<sup>1048</sup> If the mystics' deployment of language sought to retain the saying even in the said, then the mystical text had to recapitulate and make manifest the 'divine utterance'.<sup>1049</sup> In Syrian mystic discourse, mystics seek to speak the language of the Spirit, to let the speech of the Spirit be heard over scholastic reasoning and its association with the studious reading of the written word.

In the *Dove*, Barhebraeus enjoins a set of practices on the reader which is divided into three parts. The first two concern the labours of the body in the monastery and of the soul in the cell, but the third is described as 'the spiritual rest of the perfect', in the culmination of this bodily and psychic discipline. At this third level, the reader enters the realm of a mode of speaking, of spiritual intercourse; the ascetic disciplines appear as preparation for this 'intercourse with the dove'.<sup>1050</sup> In his structuring of the *Book of the Dove*, Barhebraeus' instruction concerning the disciplining of the body prepares the self for the disciplining of the soul or the mind. These disciplines open the path towards speaking with the spirit, for the instructions of the two previous parts have brought the Initiated to the level of freedom of speech with the spiritual dove.<sup>1051</sup> Herman Teule has suggested that the state of the 'freedom of speech' (Syr. *parrhisiā*) with the dove is one of the most 'fundamental'

---

<sup>1047</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 163.

<sup>1048</sup> "Mystic Speech," in *Heterologies : Discourse on the Other*, Theory and History of Literature (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 92.

<sup>1049</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1050</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 47, 565\*.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid., 48, 566\*. 'When, by the things mentioned, the soul has become cultivated and accustomed, the mind acquires perfect freedom of speech with the dove and placidly gazes at her and has intercourse with her.'

characteristics of the love of God.<sup>1052</sup> In the chapter of love in the *Ethicon*, *parrhisiā* is part of the twelfth and final state of the Initiated in the working of grace towards perfection in the love of God. In this chapter of the *Ethicon*, Barhebraeus also distinguishes between the free outbursts of speech and what can be explained of the hidden things. Revelation authorizes explanation by the very manner of its revealing the truth of what is hidden.<sup>1053</sup> For, as Barhebraeus promises to the Initiated in the *centuria*, it is the revelation of the Paraclete as 'the spirit of truth' (Syr. *rūḥā d-šrārā*), that 'will come to you and guide you into all truth' (Syr. *b-klēh šrārā*).<sup>1054</sup> The revelations of the spirit not only lead the reader into truth (*šrārā*), but it reveals into speech what can be spoken of its truth for the instruction of others. Revelation is a bringing into the open, into discourse, the hiddenness or the mystery of truth. This is not a truth which can be ascertained by the syllogistic reasoning of logic, but is given to rational discourse by the spirit.

The one hundred aphoristic sentences in the fourth part of the *Dove* proceed from the revelations of the spirit, rather than the freedom of speech that is not to be spoken within the objectifying constraints of ordinary language. The purpose of the *Dove* is the transcribing of the mysteries of the spirit into written discourse to guide others into this way of proceeding, through the Spirit in the love of God. This task requires care, since what is said in the freedom of speech with the Spirit can be easily misunderstood once it is detached from the circumstance of the utterance.<sup>1055</sup> For this reason, Barhebraeus deliberately refrains from repeating what is uttered in the 'boldness' or the 'freedom' of this utterance.<sup>1056</sup> Instead, what he is prepared 'to embody in paper' is not what is said in

---

<sup>1052</sup> Teule, "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance," 30. Teule describes Barhebraeus' insights about the love of God and the freedom of speech as 'a combination of inspiring theories, which he found in the work of Ghazali and in the writings of Christian authors, such as Joseph Ḥazzāyā, John of Dalyatha and Stephen b. Šudaylī'.

<sup>1053</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 113, 502\*. 'The twelfth is that of outbursts of speech and prominence of the scrutinizing of things to come and explaining of things hidden, those which are written in the archbook, which is the book of the knowledge of God. And to the mind, when reading them, they are here revealed.'

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid., Sentence 90, 78, 596\*.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid., 110, 499\*. 'But concerning these things the Holy Ghost says : There is mystery between me and my housemates, and it warns them to hide such things and not to divulge them, and it does not permit them to scrutinize them, except in personal intercourse with the housemates.'

<sup>1056</sup> Ibid., 104, 493\*. 'And while he neither knows himself nor any thing, he cries many times: Aba, my father, and other bold utterances, which it is not allowed to write down and to embody in paper.'



this free utterance, but what the spirit legitimates through the dictation of its mysteries to the author of the mystic text. The freedom of speech in the Spirit is thus a different mode from the dictation of writing by the Spirit that inspires the *centuria*. These different levels of spiritual speech are reminiscent of Certeau's proposal that the texts of the Western mystics 'institute a "style" that articulates itself into practices defining a *modus loquendi* and/or a *modus agendi*', that is a new or present way of speaking and manner of proceeding.<sup>1057</sup> But this mystic way of speaking is not only demarcated by its distinctive linguistic style, but by its referent that is transcendent to the text and yet speaks through the text, the speech of the Spirit. The revelation of the Spirit brings with it a spiritual epistemology, the illumination of the mind through the Spirit, founded on an alternative ontology, the 'living word' of the Spirit.<sup>1058</sup> This subsistence through the living word of the Spirit sees the immanent revelation of the transcendent God in man's experience of the world through the love of God.

---

<sup>1057</sup> Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 14.

<sup>1058</sup> Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, 110, 499\*. Wensinck notes that his translation 'in personal intercourse (with the housemates)' is more literally 'a living word' (footnote 6). Indeed the phrase *b-mel'a hāy'ā l-bayytāyē* could alternatively be translated as 'in living word to the housemates'. The significance of the cognate *baytāyūtā* has been discussed in Chapter 5; for Teule this denotes the intimacy or familiarity with God, deriving from the Syriac *baytā* as in 'house' or 'family'.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

Barhebraeus' meditational thinking on the Spirit provides insights for the Western discipline of the study of mysticism which can be categorised according to the three main aims of the thesis. The first one, Barhebraeus' understanding of the ontology of God through the love of God, has been developed to show his originality across the Syrian scientific and theological disciplines. This provides a revision of the traditional view in Syriac studies of Barhebraeus as a scholastic compiler. Secondly, the mystical experience and the metaphysics of intentionality have been shown to form the main categories of debate for the Western academic study of mysticism, categories which may be revised according to the Syrian tradition of the love of God. Finally, the role of dialogue in the hermeneutical study of mysticism set up in Chapter 2 as a way forward for the epistemological impasse in the Western academy, has been brought to full conclusion in Chapter 6 through the dialogue with Syrian hermeneutics concerning the concept of God, and the reading of Barhebraeus' mystical thought as a resolution of the impasse.

Chapter 2 showed that religious experience continues to be at the centre of modern debates in the Western study of mysticism. These debates have been defined within the academy to the neglect of the potential contribution that mystic traditions can provide. In an attempt to recover the traditions of the mystics, the work of Certeau and others was reprised in order to develop a hermeneutical approach for the study of mysticism. In particular Flood's notion of levels of discourse becomes paradigmatic for this approach, in recognising that the Western discipline of the study of mysticism represents a particular discourse of reasoning which may be informed by the traditions of mystic writing and the mystic science of interpretation of these texts. This understanding is implicit through the development of the subsequent chapters until Chapter 6 explicates how precisely Syrian hermeneutics may inform the academic study of mysticism. Barhebraeus' mysticism thus represents both the level of interpretive discourse of the Syrian tradition of mystic texts and the level of of mystic discourse in the primary sense of making claims about the ontological experience of God, through the love of God.

Chapter 3 examined the background to Barhebraeus' contribution to the Syrian tradition with his engagement in the central epistemological debates of his tradition. His writings alternatively present and reformulate the intellectual issues that had preoccupied his predecessors. He assembled the full range of intellectual resources at his disposal, including the Graeco-Syriac and the Arabic Avicennan traditions, for the purpose of clarifying and resolving the problems posed for the Syriac Christians, by the reception of the Greek sciences. For Barhebraeus, the central theme of the love of God in Syrian mysticism became a solution to the problematic of conceiving God in terms of the dominant traditions of thought inherited by the Syrians. Barhebraeus overcame the impasse between the Syrian mystic and scholastic traditions, by exposing the philosophical foundations of both sides, and proposing an integrated schema that could accommodate both. Barhebraeus indicated the way forward through the epistemological impasse in Syrian monasticism, to resolve the problem of conceiving of God either as the highest intellect or the highest being.

In Chapter 4, Barhebraeus' mysticism was explored in terms of the background to his main theme of the love of God in Syrian mysticism and his unique development of this theme for the resolution of the epistemological problem of the knowledge of God. Barhebraeus offers insights into how the mind (*hawnā*) is conditioned by its finitude in its comprehension of God; this recognition is an aid to the mind in the ascent to thinking about God, which may aspire to grow in likeness to the Father. The final part of the ascent occurs through the giving of the Father in love, by which the Spirit of the Son comes to dwell in the purified hearts of the sanctified. Only then is the mind able to pass beyond the relational notions of Father and adoptive sons, to achieve unification with God without such distinctions. The love of God marks the transition between the thinking of God through the concept, even that of personhood in the scriptural language of the Father and the Son, and the abandoning of such thinking altogether.

Therefore, there are two strands in the mysticism of Barhebraeus concerning the love of God, one emphasising the interpersonal aspect of loving relationship between the creature

who is created in the likeness of His Creator, while the other evokes love in a more dynamic sense whereby the soul is lifted beyond its created-ness, towards a state where there is a loss of the subject and thus also a surpassing of the object-hood of God, beyond the notion of substance to Barhebraeus' understanding of the biblical God as essentially the spirit of love. Barhebraeus' particular contribution to the Syrian tradition is in his understanding of spiritual likeness which overcame the metaphysical problem of the relation of God to creation through the ontic structures of form and substance.

Chapter 5 considered the ontological implications of the rival epistemologies held by the mystics and the scholastics in terms of how alternative approaches developed in the Syrian theological discourse about God. Jacob of Edessa and Stephen bar ʿŠūdḥailē, both of whose writings came to inform the West Syrian tradition, demonstrate the nature of the epistemological conflict that Barhebraeus inherited and further, the onto-theological implications of understanding God through the concept of God. Barhebraeus rather sought to reimagine the relation of epistemology to ontology in Syrian theological discourse, whereby the epistemological had come to define the ontological. Through the love of God Barhebraeus reconciles the epistemological conflict by surpassing metaphysics. In doing so, he has explicated the five causes of love to show how the love for the continuation of the self and the good of its well-being is an immanent desire of the soul, a desire that is ultimately realised and perfected in a transcendent Good.

That Barhebraeus turned to al-Ghazālī's exposition of the five causes of human love for the love of God, in order to reconcile the epistemology of the Evagrian mystics with that of the scholastics, suggests that his own tradition lacked the resources within itself to resolve this impasse. The reason for the inability of the Syrian tradition to resolve the epistemological impasse according to its internal resources may be due to the dominance of the *Organon* in the curriculum of the West Syrian monastic schools and the East Syrian schools of learning which led to the neglect of the rest of the Aristotelian sciences. Barhebraeus' systematic approach to learning led him to study all the branches of the Greek sciences and even to immerse himself in the writings of the mystics for an extended period. He was thus placed

in the privileged position of being able to represent the truth of the one to the other, in a manner that reconciled both.<sup>1059</sup>

Chapter 6 concluded that at the heart of Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God is the overcoming of the transcendent-immanent binary. For Barhebraeus, God is neither the highest being of all beings as categorised by the philosophers who were dependent on Greek metaphysics, nor the apophatic denial of this speculation in the assertion of God as non-being or even the 'nothing'.<sup>1060</sup> In his mysticism of the Spirit, he follows the apophatic Dionysian tradition of affirming the necessity of going beyond the divine names, for the Spirit is not another name for God. Rather, the Spirit is more essential in form than even the Godhead, transcending the binary of Creator-created that is implicit in the concept of God as first cause in onto-theological discourse, to show the essential given-ness of God as Spirit.

Richard Kearney in his book *Anatheism Returning to God After God*, makes reference to 'transcendent-immanence' in the understanding of Christian mystics of the Western tradition.<sup>1061</sup> Barhebraeus' mysticism of the love of God contributes to this understanding of God, through the realisation of man's spiritual capacity to reach beyond himself in love for what is beautiful and good. This is a love which begins with his concern for his own being, extends towards love of the beautiful good, which is a love of something other for the sake of its giving, and returns to the understanding of oneself, by which man finds an affinity with the gift of love through the Spirit that is revealed within his own being. In Barhebraeus' mystic discourse, the God beyond metaphysics can only be thought in language that is free of propositional thinking, one that allows the giving of the gift of love and its return without reasoning as to its cause. In love the gift can be given, received and returned without asking the question of the why, because this presupposes a cause and

---

<sup>1059</sup> For the comparison with Aquinas' reconciliation of the Western epistemological impasse between Augustinianism and Aristotelianism: MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry : Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, 115.

<sup>1060</sup> For example the Christian mystic Gregory of Nyssa suggests that all being proceeds out of the divine nothingness, in his interpretation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying*, 36.

<sup>1061</sup> Kearney refers to the 'transcendent immanence' that he says characterises modern sacramental aesthetics, but which he also identifies in the history of the Christian mystics from John of the Cross to Meister Eckhart, as well as Sufi mystics like Rumi. Richard Kearney, *Anatheism : Returning to God after God*, Insurrections (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 99.

insists on a ground that restrains the mystic discourse of the infinite, the giving of the love of God by which the Spirit speaks. Kearney states that it is the 'radical and recurring sense of something more – something ulterior, extra and unexpected – that various religions call God'.<sup>1062</sup> In the Syrian mystic tradition, the truth of this sense of 'something more' that is called 'God', is explored by Barhebraeus through his meditation on the love of God which he unfolds in the post-metaphysical language of the Spirit. Barhebraeus' mystic discourse offers a critique of thinking God through the concept, to surpass the propositional thinking about God through the meditative thought on the love of God.

---

<sup>1062</sup> Ibid., 183.

## Appendix 1: Chronology of Barhebraeus' works

Takahashi provides a chronological order for Barhebraeus' works, arranged primarily according to those works for which there is a known date of composition. He then inserts others into this list where there is an indication that they were written either some time before or after those works which are more definitely dated. This classification does not of course allow for the possibility of Barhebraeus revising his works after their initial composition, as Takahashi has admitted.<sup>1063</sup> The chronology provided below, follows in outline Takahashi's list, provided in Section I.2.3,<sup>1064</sup> using both the Latin and Syriac titles of Barhebraeus' works where appropriate,<sup>1065</sup> supplemented with information from Takahashi's more detailed overview in later sections.<sup>1066</sup>

- *Ktābā d-pushshāq ḥelmē*<sup>1067</sup>
- *Mēmra shennāyā*: before 1261<sup>1068</sup>
- *Ktābā d-tēgrat tēgrātā*: before May 1276 and *Swād sōpiya*
- *Candelabrium sanctuarii* = *Ktābā da-mnārat qudshē*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Base: 1266/7
- 'Lecture' on Euclid's *Elements*: 1268, in Marāgha
- *Mnārat qudshē*, 4<sup>th</sup> Base/Foundation: 1271/72
- 'Lecture' on Ptolemy's *Almagest*: 1272, in Marāgha<sup>1069</sup>

---

<sup>1063</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 90-91.

<sup>1064</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-94.

<sup>1065</sup> In the main body of the thesis, the Syriac titles and English translation have been preferred, but the Latin titles are included here when they have been referred to in the secondary literature. The Syriac titles follow Takahashi in using those given in J. B. Abbeloos and Thomas Lamy's edition of the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*, while the Latin titles reflect the conventions established by Giuseppe Simone Assemani's *Bibliotheca Orientalis*. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II:475-82. Giuseppe Simone Assemani and Biblioteca apostolica vaticana., *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana : In Qua Manuscriptos Codices Syriacos, Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Hebraicos, Samaritanos, Armenicos, Aethiopicos, Graecos, Aegyptiacos, Ibericos, & Malabaricos, Jussu et Munificentia Clementis XI. Pontificis Maximi, Ex Oriente Conquisitos, Comparatos, Avectos, & Bibliothecæ Vaticanæ Addictos*, 3 vols. (Romæ: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719-1728), 268-72.

<sup>1066</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 63-90. See Section I.2.2.

<sup>1067</sup> *Ibid.*, 85. Takahashi states that this was composed during Barhebraeus' youth, according to the list of his works provided by his brother in the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum*.

<sup>1068</sup> For the sake of clarity, only dating from the Common Era (CE) is used in this list.

- *K. d-zalgē*: coming after *Swād sōpiya* and *Awṣar Rāzē*<sup>1070</sup>
- *K. d-Awṣar Rāzē*: 1272 or 1278<sup>1071</sup>
- *Nomocanon* = *K. d-Huddāyē*: coming after *Mnārat qudshē* and *K. d-zalgē*
- *K. d-bābātā*: (probably) before *Swād sōpiya*<sup>1072</sup>
- *K. d-swād sōpiya*: before 1275<sup>1073</sup>
- *Chronicon Syriacum/Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* = *K. d-maktbānūt zabnē*: 1276
- *K. d-pushshāqā d-Īrōte'ōs*: 1276/7, in Mosul<sup>1074</sup>
- *K. da-grammaṭiqī ba-mshuḥtā d-mār Aprēm*: summer 1277, Baghdad<sup>1075</sup>
- *Mēmra zawgānāyā*: 1277, Baghdad
- *K. d-remzē wa-m'irānwātā d-Abū 'Alī bar Sīnā*<sup>1076</sup>
- *Ascensus mentis* = *K. d-sullāqā hawnānāyā*: 1278/9<sup>1077</sup>
- *Ethicon* = *K. d-ītīqōn*: completed on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1279, in Marāgha<sup>1078</sup>
- *K. d-yawnā*: after the *Ethicon*<sup>1079</sup>

<sup>1069</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 84. In the *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* that he 'solved/commented on' (šrā) Euclid and Ptolemy in Marāgha in 1267/8 and 1272 respectively. Takahashi comments that: 'In the absence of any known written works by Barhebraeus on Euclid and the Almagest, the word "šrā" here has usually been understood to mean that Barhebraeus "explained" these works orally.' Thus Takahashi interprets these oral commentaries as 'lectures'. Abbeloos and Lamy, *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed*, II.443-44.

<sup>1070</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 90-91. Since this work is mentioned in both *Swād Sōpiya* and *Awṣar Rāzē*, this would place it prior to these works. Takahashi discusses further issues of dating *Ktābā d-zalgē* according to the contents.

<sup>1071</sup> For discussion of the problems of dating the composition of this work, *ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>1072</sup> Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 17.

<sup>1073</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 93. Following Janssens, 1275 is the *terminus ante quem* for its composition, but Takahashi comments that the grounds given for this dating by Janssens are not certain. Janssens, *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*, 16-17.

<sup>1074</sup> Both the date and the place of composition are provided in a note in the original manuscript; this note is reproduced by Marsh. Marsh, *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebraeus*, 186, 76\*.

<sup>1075</sup> A short treatise on grammar in the 'heptasyllabic metre' of Mar Ephrem. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 81.

<sup>1076</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. Translation of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. The oldest manuscript, a parallel Arabic-Syriac text, was copied during Barhebraeus' lifetime and precisely dated (Laur. Or. 6; December 1278).

<sup>1077</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. This book is in two parts, the first dealing with astronomy in 8 chapters, and the second with mathematical geography in 7 chapters. The dating of *Ascensus mentis* follows Nau's edition: Nau, *Le Livre de L'ascension de L'esprit sur la Forme du Ciel et de la Terre : Cours D'astronomie Rédigé en 1279 par Grégoire Aboulfarag, dit Bar Hebræus*, 26.4f., 196.10f.

<sup>1078</sup> Following the subscription in Brit. Lib. Add. 7194.

<sup>1079</sup> Wensinck states that the *Ethicon* was written in 1278 (following a note in the Codex Rich n° 1794, British Museum) and that the *Dove* was subsequent to this. Wensinck, *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*, xiv.



- *Shorter Anaphora of St. James*: 1281/2<sup>1080</sup>
- *K. d-ṣemḥē*: completed before December 1284<sup>1081</sup>
- *Butyrum Sapientae* = *K. d-hêwat ḥekmtā*: Part II completed on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1285 in Mosul, Part III at end of December 1285, and Part IV on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1286.<sup>1082</sup>
- *K. d-Ṭalyūt Hawnā*: left unfinished on his departure to Marāgha, in 1286.<sup>1083</sup>
- *Historia dynastiarum* = *K. d-maktbānūt zabnē arabāyā; Mukhtaṣar tā'rīkh al-duwal*<sup>1084</sup>
- *K. d-qānōnā rabbā d-Abū 'Alī*,<sup>1085</sup> *K. d-belṣūṣītā*,<sup>1086</sup> both left unfinished, now lost.

<sup>1080</sup> Ibid., 88, 94. This is a shortened version of the Anaphora of St. James; in the headings of this anaphora it is frequently stated that the revision was undertaken by Barhebraeus, and composed 'in the mountains of Armenia'.

<sup>1081</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 82. This is a detailed prose treatise on grammar in four parts: I. Nouns. II. Verbs. III. Particles. IV. General (phonetics/orthography).

<sup>1082</sup> See Mingana Syr. 310, fol. 216r.

<sup>1083</sup> Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 66, 225. The unfinished mystical work, the *Book of the Youthful Mind* (*K. d-Ṭalyūt Hawnā*) is not considered in the thesis, since there are only Arabic and Turkish translations available. Samir's article reproduces the Arabic version of this text in Appendix, II: 'Version arabe rimée de l'«enfance de l'esprit»'. Samir, "Un Récit Autobiographique d'Ibn al-'Ibri," 44-51.

<sup>1084</sup> The work had been virtually completed before Barhebraeus' death, the details are given by Barṣawmā (in *Chron. Eccl.* II: 469). See also the quotation given at Chapter 3, p52, n.181.

<sup>1085</sup> Although this 'translation/abridgement' of Ibn Sīnā's *Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* is lost, the 'first four quires' were completed at the time of Barhebraeus' death. Takahashi, *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*, 87.

<sup>1086</sup> Ibid., 82. Takahashi describes this work as an 'epitome of grammar'.

## Appendix 2: Works cited of Barhebraeus

- *Ascent of the Mind*: Syr. *Ktābā d-sullāqā hawnānāyā* - Lat. *Ascensus Mentis*
- *Dove = Book of the Dove*: Syr. *Ktābā d-Yawnā* - Lat. *Liber Columbae*
- *Book of Directions*: Syr. *Ktābā d-Huddāyē* - Lat. *Nomocanon*
- *Book of the Essence of Secrets*: Syr. *Ktābā d-zubdat al-asrār*
- *Book of Excerpts on the Book of the Holy Hierotheos*: *Ktābā d-pushshāqā d-Īrōte'ōs*
- *Book of the Pupils of the Eye*: *Ktābā d-bābātā*
- *Book of Remarks and Admonitions*: *Ktābā d-remzē wa-m'irānwātā d-Abū 'Alī bar Sīnā*
- *Book of the Youthful Mind*: *Ktābā d-Ṭalyūt Hawnā*
- *Candelabrum = Candelabrum of the Sanctuary*: Syr. *Mnārat qudshē* - Lat. *Candelabrium Sanctuarii*.
- *Chronography*: Syr. *Maktbānūt Zabnē* – in 2 volumes, with Latin titles by convention, *Chronicon Syriacum* and *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* (*Chron. Eccl.*)
- *Concise Treatise on the Human Soul*: *Maqāla mukhtaṣara fī al-naḥs al-basharīya*
- *Conversation of Wisdom*: *Ktābā d-swād sōpiya* (*Swād Sōpiya*)
- *Cream = Cream of Wisdom*: Syr. *Ktābā d-ḥēwat ḥekmtā* (*Ḥēwat Ḥekmtā*) - Lat. *Butyrum Sapientae*
- *Ethicon = Book of the Ethicon*: *Ktābā d-ītīqōn*
- *History of the Dynasties*: Arabic. *Mukhtaṣar tā'rīkh al-duwal* – Syr. *Ktābā d-maktbānūt zabnē arabāyā* - Lat. *Historia compendiosa dynastiarum*
- *Letter to Catholicus Denḥā I*
- *Poems*: Syr. *Mushḥātā* - Lat. *Carmina*
- *Treatise of Treatises*: *Ktābā d-tēgrat tēgrātā* (*Tēgrat tēgrātā*)
- *Treatise on the Science of the Human Soul*: *Mukhtaṣar fī 'ilm al-naḥs al-insānīya*

## Appendix 3: Glossary of Key Terms

### Syriac Terms

‘arpelā	cloud, thick darkness (Gr. <i>gnophos</i> ) <sup>1087</sup>
’aynā	eye
barqā	lightning
bātar kyānāyātā	after the physics, i.e. metaphysics
baytāyūtā	communion or familiarity
dāmyūtā	likeness - <i>dāmyūtā ksītā</i> : hidden likeness
durrāšā	disputation
‘eltā	cause (Gr. <i>aitia</i> )
eskōlāyē	the school-men, i.e. scholastics
gmīrē	the perfect
gšīme	corporeal things cf. <i>lā gšīme</i> : non-corporeal
gulyānē	revelations
ḥadāyūtā	unification
hawnā	the mind, intellect or heart - Evagrian <i>nous</i>
haymānūtā	faith
ḥbīkūtā	conmingling
ḥezwā	vision
hnīy	sweet, fragrant, pleasant, grateful, agreeable
ḥubbā	love
īda‘tā	knowledge (Gr. <i>gnosis</i> )

---

<sup>1087</sup> For this Glossary, foreign terms which belong to direct quotations have not been included, in order to avoid the problem of the different transliteration systems used by scholars. Reference has been made to Sokoloff's dictionary for the correct representation of the East Syriac vowels, as displayed in Bedjan's edition. Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon : A Translation from the Latin : Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns ; Piscataway).

<i>’ītūtā</i>	essence, substance
<i>kūnnāyē</i>	terminology, names, denominations
<i>kyānā</i> (pl. <i>kyānē</i> )	nature
<i>malpānā</i>	teacher
<i>mamlā</i>	speech, diction; talk, discourse
<i>melīle</i>	endowed with speech and reason, articulate, rational
<i>mellē</i>	words
<i>meltā</i>	word precept, the Logos; the faculty of speech, thought, reason
<i>mēmṛā</i> (pl. <i>mēmṛē</i> )	a discourse, homily; treatise or division of a book <sup>1088</sup>
<i>miškan</i>	dwelling place or tabernacle
<i>mlīlūtā</i>	logic, reason
<i>mušḥātā</i>	degrees (of perfection)
<i>napšā</i>	soul
<i>ndīq</i>	to peer
<i>nūhrā</i>	light
<i>parrhisiā</i>	freedom of speech
<i>petgāmē</i>	sentences
<i>pīlāsāwpūtā</i>	philosophy (of the Greeks)
<i>qadīšē</i>	the holy ones or saints
<i>qnomā</i> (pl. <i>qnomē</i> )	essence, substance, actual existence (Gr. <i>hypostasis</i> )
<i>rāḥmā:</i>	mercy, compassion, favour
<i>rāzā</i> (pl. <i>rāzē</i> )	mystery
<i>regšā</i>	sense perception

---

<sup>1088</sup> The range of meanings for *mēmṛā* listed here are limited to its usage (as with the other entries) within the body of the thesis. Payne Smith and Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, 247.

<i>reḥmtā</i>	love, dilection - <i>reḥmat ʿallāhā</i> : love of God
<i>rūḥā</i> :	spirit
<i>rūḥānāyā</i> (pl. <i>rūḥānāyata</i> )	spiritual
<i>šapyā</i>	pure, luminous
<i>šelyā</i>	solitude
<i>šetqā</i>	silence
<i>špaʿ</i>	to pour out
<i>šrā</i>	to solve, to comment on; a lecture
<i>šrārā</i>	truth - <i>rūḥā d-šrārā</i> : the spirit of truth
<i>šūbhā</i>	glory
<i>šūhlāpā</i>	states of mind
<i>šūprā</i>	beauty - <i>šūprā barrāyā</i> : outer beauty (cf. inner: <i>gawwāyā</i> )
<i>tawdyātā</i>	confessions
<i>tēoriya</i>	contemplation, meditation, speculation (Gr. <i>theōria</i> )
<i>ṭābā</i>	the good/Good - <i>ṭābtā</i> : that which is good

### Greek Terms

<i>agape</i>	love (1John 4:8) cf. <i>eros</i> <sup>1089</sup>
<i>agathos</i>	good - <i>ho kalos agathon</i> : the beautiful good
<i>alētheia</i>	truth, unconcealment
<i>apatheia</i>	impassibility, the passionless state - <i>pathē</i> : the passions
<i>aporia</i>	paradox, uncertainty
<i>dynameis</i>	revelatory energies cf. <i>hyperousios</i> : (divine) super-essence
<i>eidos</i>	image, archetype – <i>eidōlon theou</i> : the idol of God

<sup>1089</sup> Greek accents have not been included in the body of the thesis, except when quoting directly from the secondary sources, and thus do not appear in the Glossary (thus *agapē* not *agápē*).

<i>eikasīa</i>	imagination
<i>epekeina</i>	beyond - <i>epekeina ousias</i> : beyond-being
<i>epistēmē logikē</i>	the Greek 'scholastic' science of <i>logos</i>
<i>epithumia</i>	desire cf. <i>thumos</i> : repulsion
<i>eudaimonia</i>	the human good
<i>haploos</i>	simple cf. <i>suntheton</i> : composite (entity)
<i>idea</i>	form, idea - <i>idea tou agathou</i> : the idea of the good
<i>logismoī</i>	evil thoughts
<i>logos</i>	speech, word etc. - <i>logos apophatikos</i> : a declaratory utterance
<i>mystērion</i>	mystery
<i>noēma</i>	concept – pl. <i>noēmata</i> : conceptual depictions (Evagrius)
<i>noēsis</i>	intuition
<i>nous</i>	the intellect or mind – <i>pneumatikos nous</i> : the spiritual mind
<i>ousia</i>	essence, being - <i>to on</i> : being cf. <i>ta onta</i> : beings
<i>phasis</i>	to say something (in the sense of belonging) – <i>kataphasis</i> : a denial cf. <i>apophasis</i> : an affirmation
<i>philautia</i>	love of self
<i>phusis</i>	nature
<i>theion</i>	divine – <i>theos</i> : God
<i>theologia</i>	the vision of the Holy Trinity – in the Evagrian schema: i) <i>praktikē</i> : the active life ii) <i>theōria physikē</i> : contemplative knowledge of created things iii) <i>theologikē</i> of the Trinity
<i>theosis</i>	deification

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

- Abbeloos, J. B., and Thomas Joseph Lamy. *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Ecclesiasticum, Quod e Codice Musei Britannici Descriptum Conjuncta Opera ed* [in Syriac and Latin]. 2 vols Lovanii (Belgium): C. Peeters, 1872.
- Al-Ghazālī. *Al-Ghazālī on Love, Longing, Intimacy & Contentment* [in English]. Translated by Eric L. Ormsby. Islamic Texts Society Al-Ghazali Series. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011.
- . *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error : An Annotated Translation of Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal*. Translated by Richard Joseph McCarthy. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000.
- . *The Incoherence of the Philosophers = Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*. Translated by Michael E. Marmura. Islamic Translation Series. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997.
- Aristotle. *The Metaphysics of Aristotle : Literally Translated from the Greek*. Translated by John H. McMahon. Bohn's Classical Library. London: George Bell, 1896.
- Assemani, Giuseppe Simone, and Biblioteca apostolica vaticana. *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana : In Qua Manuscriptos Codices Syriacos, Arabicos, Persicos, Turcicos, Hebraicos, Samaritanos, Armenicos, Æthiopicos, Græcos, Ægyptiacos, Ibericos, & Malabaricos, Jussu et Munificentia Clementis XI. Pontificis Maximi, Ex Oriente Conquisitos, Comparatos, Auctos, & Bibliothecæ Vaticanæ Addictos*. 3 vols Romæ: Typis Sacræ Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1719-1728.
- Bakoš, J. "Le Candélabre des Sanctuaires de Grégoire Aboulfaradj dit Barhebraeus." [in Syriac and French]. *Patrologia Orientalis* XXII (1933): 489-628.
- Bar Hebraeus, Gregory John. *Ethicon : Christian Ethics (Morals)*. [Glane/Losser] Holland: St. Ephrem the Syrian Monastery, 1985.
- . *Historia Compendiosa Dynastiarum, Arab. ed. & Lat. Versa ab E. Pocockio*. Oxon. 1663.
- Bedjan, Paul. *Ethicon : Seu, Moralia Gregorii Barhebraei* [in Syriac]. Parisiis ; Lipsiae: Otto Harrassowitz, 1898.
- . *Gregorii Barhebraei Chronicon Syriacum* [in French ; Syriac]. Parisiis: Maisonneuve, 1890.
- . *Nomocanon Gregorii Barhebraei*. Parisiis ; Lipsiae: Harrassowitz, 1898.
- Brock, Sebastian P. *The Harp of the Spirit : Twelve Poems of Saint Ephrem*. Studies Supplementary to Sobornost. London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1975.
- . *Isaac of Nineveh : (Isaac the Syrian) : 'The Second Part', Chapters IV-XLI* [in Syriac text (Vol. 554) with English translation (Vol. 555).]. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. 2 vols Lovanii Louvain: Peeters, 1995.
- . *The Luminous Eye : The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*. Cistercian Studies Series. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992.
- . *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*. Cistercian Studies Series. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1987.
- . "Two Letters of the Patriarch Timothy from the Late Eighth Century on Translations from Greek." *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (1999): 233-46.
- Budge, E. A. Wallis. *The Chronography*. 2 vols Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1976.

- . *The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers : Being Histories of the Anchorites, Recluses, Monks, Coenobites, and Ascetic Fathers of the Deserts of Egypt between A.D. CCL and A.D. CCCC circiter*. 2 vols London: Chatto & Windus, 1907.
- Chabot, Jean Baptiste. *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)* [in Syriac and French]. 4 vols Bruxelles: Culture et Civilisation, 1963.
- Dolabani, Yuhanna. *Mušḥātā* [in Syriac]. Glane/Losser Holand: Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian, 1983.
- Draguet, Rene. *Commentaire du Livre d'Abba Isaie (Logoi I-XV)*. CSCO. Vol. 326, Louvain: Peeters, 1972.
- Drossaart Lulofs, H. J. *On the Philosophy of Aristotle*. Philosophia Antiqua. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965.
- Ephraem, Syrus. *Hymns on Paradise*. Translated by Sebastian P. Brock. Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1990.
- Frankenberg, Wilhelm. *Euagrius Ponticus* [in Syriac and Greek on opposite pages]. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912.
- Frothingham, Arthur Lincoln. *Stephen Bar Sudaili : The Syrian Mystic, and the Book of Hierotheos*. Leyden: E.J. Brill, 1886.
- Gottheil, Richard J. H. "A Synopsis of Greek Philosophy by Bar Hebraeus." *Hebraica* 3.4 (1887): 249-54.
- Guillaumont, Antoine. *Les Six Centuries des "Képhalaia Gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique. Édition Critique de la Version Syriaque Commune et Édition d'une Nouvelle Version Syriaque Intégrale avec une Double Traduction Française. T.28*. Patrologia Orientalis. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958.
- Guillaumont, Antoine, and Claire Guillaumont. *Évagre le Pontique. Le Gnostique, ou, a Celui Qui est Devenu Digne de la Science*. Sources Chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1989.
- Hansbury, Mary. *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*. Texts from Christian Late Antiquity. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2006.
- Harmless, William, and Raymond R. Fitzgerald. "The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus." *Theological Studies* 62, no. 3 (2001): 498.
- Janssens, Herman F. "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 52, no. 1 (1935): 1-21.
- . "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye (Concluded)." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 47, no. 2 (1931): 94-134.
- . "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye (Continued)." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 48, no. 4 (1932): 209-63.
- . *L'Entretien de la Sagesse : Introduction aux Œuvres Philosophiques de Bar Hebraeus*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937.
- Joose, N. Peter. *A Syriac Encyclopaedia of Aristoteleian Philosophy : Barhebraeus (13th c.), Butyrum Sapientiae, Books of Ethics, Economy, and Politics : A Critical Edition, with Introduction, Translation, Commentary, and Glossaries* [in Syriac Estrangelo text with facing English translation; introduction and commentary in English.]. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2004.
- King, Daniel. *The Earliest Syriac Translation of Aristotle's Categories : Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Marsh, Fred Shipley. *The Book Which Is Called the Book of the Holy Hierotheos, with Extracts from the Prolegomena and Commentary of Theodosios of Antioch and from the "Book of Excerpts" and Other Works of Gregory Bar-Hebræus* [in English ; Syriac]. London: Williams and Norgate for the Text and Translation Society, 1927.
- Nau, François. *Documents Pour Servir a L'histoire de l'Église Nestorienne* [in Syriac and French]. Patrologia Orientalis. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1919.
- . *Le Livre de L'ascension de L'esprit sur la Forme du Ciel et de la Terre : Cours D'astronomie Rédigé en 1279 par Grégoire Aboulfarag, dit Bar Hebræus* [in Syriac



- and French]. Bibliothèque de L'école des Hautes Études Sciences Philologiques et Historiques. 2 vols Paris: É. Bouillon, 1899.
- Plato, and H. D. P. Lee. *The Republic*. Penguin Classics. 2nd (revised) ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987.
- Poortman, E. L. J., and H. J. Drossaart Lulofs. *Nicolaus Damascenus De Plantis : Five Translations* [in Syriac, Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, with English translations.]. Verhandelingen Der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van Wetenschappen Afd Letterkunde Nieuwe Reeks. Amsterdam: North-Holland Pub. Co., 1989.
- Rolt, C. E. *Dionysius the Areopagite : On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*. [Kila], Mont.: Kessinger, 1992.
- Rorem, Paul, and John C. Lamoreaux. *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus : Annotating the Areopagite*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Russell, Norman. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers : The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. Cistercian Studies Series. London ; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Mowbray; Cistercian, 1981.
- Scebabi, Augustinus. *Gregorii Bar-Hebraei Carmina* [in Syriac]. Romae: ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. De Propaganda Fide, 1877.
- Sherwood, P. "Mimro de Serge de Rešayna sur la Vie Spirituelle." [in Syriac and French]. *L'Orient syrien* 5, 6.
- Teule, Herman G. B. *Ethicon : Mēmra I* [in English ; Syriac]. Louvain: E. Peeters, 1993.
- Watt, John W. *Aristotelian Rhetoric in Syriac : Butyrum Sapientiae, Book of Rhetoric* [in Parallel Syriac text and English translation]. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Wensinck, A. J. *Bar Hebraeus's Book of the Dove : Together with Some Chapters from His Ethikon*. Leyden: E. J. Brill, 1919.

## Secondary Sources

- Abrahamov, Binyamin. *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism : The Teachings of Al-Ghazâlî and Al-Dabbâgh*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003.
- Ahearne, Jeremy. *Michel de Certeau : Interpretation and Its Other*. Key Contemporary Thinkers. Cambridge: Polity, 1995.
- Andruzac, Christophe. *René Guénon: La Contemplation Métaphysique et L'expérience Mystique* Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1980.
- Arthur, Rosemary A. "A Sixth-Century Origenist: Stephen Bar Sudaile and His Relationship with Ps-Dionysius." Paper presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, 1991.
- Badiou, Alain, and Nicolas Truong. *In Praise of Love* [Éloge de l'amour.]. Translated by Peter Bush. London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.
- Barnes, Barry, and David Bloor. "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge." In *Rationality and Relativism*, edited by Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes, 21-47. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982.
- Barsoum, Ignatius Aphram, and Matti Moosa. *The Scattered Pearls : A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences*. 2nd rev. ed. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2003.
- Becker, Adam H. *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom : The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*. Divinations : Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.
- Beggiani, Seely J. *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality : The Syriac Tradition*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1991.
- Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.

- Beulay, Robert. "Des Centuries de Joseph Ḥazzaya Retrouvées?". *Parole de l'Orient* 3, no. 1 (1972): 5-44.
- . "Formes de Lumière et Lumière Sans Forme: Le Thème de la Lumière dans la Mystique de Jean de Dalyatha." In *Mélanges Antoine Guillaumont : Contributions À L'étude des Christianismes Orientaux, avec une Bibliographie du Dédicataire*, edited by Antoine Guillaumont. Cahiers D'orientalisme, 131-41. Genève: Cramer, 1988.
- Binns, John. *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bitton-Ashkelony, Brouria. "The Limit of the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ): Pure Prayer According to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh." *Zeitschrift Fur Antikes Christentum-Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 2 (2011): 291-321.
- Brock, Sebastian P. *From Antagonism to Assimilation : Syriac Attitudes to Greek Learning*. Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1980.
- . "From Qatar to Tokyo, by Way of Mar Saba: The Translations of Isaac of Beth Qatraye (Isaac the Syrian)." *ARAM Periodical* 12 (2000): 475-84.
- . "Monasticism in Iraq : The Cultural Contribution." In *The Christian Heritage of Iraq : Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*, edited by Erica C. D. Hunter. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, 64-80. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.
- . "Some Uses of the Term Theoria in the Writings of Isaac of Nineveh." *Parole de l'Orient* 20 (1995): 407-19.
- . *Spirituality in the Syriac Tradition*. 2nd ed. Kottayam: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005.
- . "Syriac Commentary Tradition." In *From Ephrem to Romanos : Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*. Variorum Collected Studies Series, 3-18. Aldershot ; Brookfield, USA: Ashgate, 1999.
- . "A Syriac Intermediary for the Arabic Theology of Aristotle? In Search of a Chimera?". In *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, edited by Cristina D'Ancona Costa, 293-306. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- . "Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1976): 17-36.
- Burnett, Charles. "Antioch as a Link between Arabic and Latin Culture in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century." In *Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages : The Translators and Their Intellectual and Social Context*, edited by Charles Burnett. Collected Studies, 1-78. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010.
- Caputo, John D. *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*. Rev. reprint. ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 1986.
- . "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart." In *Derrida and Deconstruction*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman. Continental Philosophy, 24-39. New York ; London: Routledge, 1989.
- Certeau, Michel de. *The Mystic Fable* [La fable mystique.]. Translated by Michael B. Smith. Religion and Postmodernism. Vol. 1, Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- . "Mystic Speech." In *Heterologies : Discourse on the Other*. Theory and History of Literature, 80-100. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.
- Chialà, Sabino "Les Mystiques Syro-Orientaux, une École ou une Époque?". In *Les Mystiques Syriaques*, edited by Alain Desreumaux. Études Syriaques, 63-78. Paris: Geuthner, 2011.
- Clayton, John, Anne M. Blackburn, and Thomas D. Carroll. *Religions, Reasons and Gods : Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Colless, Brian E. "The Mysticism of Bar Hebraeus." *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 54, no. 1 (1988): 153-73.

- . "The Mysticism of John Saba." PhD, University of Melbourne, 1969.
- . "The Mysticism of John Saba." *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39, no. 1 (1973): 83-102.
- . *The Wisdom of the Pearlers : An Anthology of Syriac Christian Mysticism*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 2008.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish, Roger Lipsey, and Bollingen Foundation Collection (Library of Congress). *Coomaraswamy*. Bollingen Series. 3 vols Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977.
- Cupitt, Don. *Mysticism after Modernity*. Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
- Cutsinger, James S. *Paths to the Heart : Sufism and the Christian East*. The Perennial Philosophy Series. Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2002.
- Derrida, Jacques. "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials " Translated by Ken Freiden. In *Languages of the Unsayable : The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser. Irvine Studies in the Humanities, 3-70. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- Dupuy, Michel. "Spiritualité." In *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique : Doctrine et Histoire*, edited by Marcel Viller, Charles Baumgartner and André Rayez. Paris: G. Beauchesne et ses fils, 1937.
- El-Bizri, N. "Avicenna and Essentialism." *Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (Jun 2001): 753-78.
- Eliaeson, Sven. "Max Weber's Methodology: An Ideal - Type." *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 36, no. 3 (2000): 241-63.
- Fitzgerald, Timothy. *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Flood, Gavin D. *The Ascetic Self : Subjectivity, Memory, and Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . *Beyond Phenomenology : Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London ; New York: Cassell, 1999.
- . *The Importance of Religion : Meaning and Action in Our Strange World*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.
- . "Reflections on Tradition and Inquiry in the Study of Religions." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 47-58.
- Forman, Robert K. C. "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting." In *The Problem of Pure Consciousness : Mysticism and Philosophy*, edited by Robert K. C. Forman, 3-49. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- . "Mystical Knowledge: Knowledge by Identity." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1993): 705-38.
- . *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Frank, Richard M. *Creation and the Cosmic System : Al-Ghazâlî & Avicenna*. Abhandlungen Der Heidelberger Akademie Der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992.
- Furlani, Giuseppe. "Di Tre Scritti in Lingua Siriaca Di Barhebreo Sull' Anima." *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 14 (1934): 284-308.
- Gadamer, Hans Georg, Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall. *Truth and Method* [in Translation of Wahrheit und Methode.]. Continuum Impacts. 2nd rev. ed. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Gale, Richard M. "Mysticism and Philosophy." *The Journal of Philosophy* 57, no. 14 (1960): 471-81.
- Gellman, Jerome. "Mysticism." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014).
- Gilson, Etienne. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1955.
- Griffith, S. H. *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian*

- Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* [in English with some Arabic text.]. Variorum Collected Studies Series. Aldershot ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002.
- Guillaumont, Antoine. *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et L'histoire de L'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*. Patristica Sorbonensia. Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1962.
- Gutas, Dimtri. "Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle's Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Bagdâd." *Der Islam* 60, no. 2 (1983).
- . *Greek Thought, Arab Culture : The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th c.)*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Hage, Wolfgang. "Ecumenical Aspects of Barhebraeus' Christology." *The Harp : A Review of Syriac and Oriental Studies* IV, no. 1, 2, 3 (1991): 103-09.
- Hagman, Patrik. *The Asceticism of Isaac of Nineveh*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Hausherr, Irénée. "De Doctrina Spirituali Christianorum Orientalium, Quaestiones et Scripta, I". *Orientalia Christiana* 30, no. 3 (1933): 147-211.
- Healey, John F. *First Studies in Syriac*. University Semitics Study Aids. Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1980.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking : A Translation of 'Gelassenheit'*. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- . "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking." In *Basic Writings from "Being and Time" (1927) to "the Task of Thinking" (1964)*, edited by David Farrell Krell, 431-49. London: Routledge, 1993.
- . *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics : World, Finitude, Solitude*. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- . *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- . *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* [Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz.]. Translated by Michael Heim. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- . *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Translated by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Studies in Continental Thought. 1st pbk. ed. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Hollis, Martin, and Steven Lukes. *Rationality and Relativism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982.
- Hugonnard-Roche, Henri. "Jacob of Edessa and the Reception of Aristotle." In *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of his Day*, edited by R. B. ter Haar Romeny. Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden, 205-22. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008.
- . "Le Corpus Philosophique Syriaque aux VIe-VIIIe Siècles." Paper presented at the "Late antiquity and Arabic thought : patterns in the constitution of European culture" Strasbourg, March 12-14 2004.
- . "L'oeuvre Logique de Barhebraeus." *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 129-43.
- . "Sur les Versions Syriaques des "Catégories" d'Aristote." *Journal Asiatique* 275, no. 3-4 (1987): 205-22.
- Hunter, Erica C. D. "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbasids." In *Der Christliche Orient Und Seines Umwelt. Gesammelte Studien Zu Ehren Jurgen Tubach*, edited by Sophia G. Vashalomidze and Lutz Greisiger, 289-302. Wiesbaden Harrassowitz, 2007.
- Huxley, Aldous. *The Doors of Perception*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1954.
- . *The Perennial Philosophy*. London: Triad Grafton, 1985.
- Ishida, Huyo. "Otto's Theory of Religious Experience as Encounter with the Numinous and Its Application to Buddhism." *Japanese Religions* XVI, no. 4 (1989): 17-25.

- Jacobi, R. "Nasīb." In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. W.P. Heinrichs Leiden: Brill Online, 2013.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience : A Study in Human Nature*. Penguin Classics. New York ; London: Penguin Books, 1985.
- Janssens, Herman F. "Bar Hebraeus; Book of the Pupils of the Eye." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 47, no. 1 (1930): 26-49.
- Jantzen, Grace. *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Joose, N. Peter. "Bar Hebraeus' *Ktaba Da-Hewath Hekhmtha* (*Butyrum Sapientiae*): A Description of the Extant Manuscripts." *Le Muséon* 112, no. 3-4 (1999): 417-58.
- . "Expounding on a Theme: Structure and Sources of Barhebraeus." In *The Syriac Renaissance*, edited by Herman G. B. Teule. Eastern Christian Studies, 136-50. Leuven: Peeters, 2010.
- Jullien, Florence. "Une Question de Controverse Religieuse: la Lettre au Catholicos Nestorien Mār Denḥā I." *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 95-113.
- Katz, Steven T. "The 'Conservative' Character of Mystical Experience." In *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 3-60. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- . "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz. Studies in Philosophy and Religion, 22-74. London: Sheldon Press, 1978.
- . *Mysticism and Language*. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.
- . *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*. Oxford England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Kearney, Richard. *Anatheism : Returning to God after God*. Insurrections. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Kessel, Grigory, and Karl Pinggéa. *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature*. Eastern Christian Studies. Leuven ; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011.
- Kessler, Michael, and Christian Sheppard. *Mystics : Presence and Aporia*. Religion and Postmodernism. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- King, Daniel. "Alexander of Aphrodisias' *On the Principles of the Universe* in a Syriac Adaptation." *Le Muséon* 123, no. 1 (2010): 159-91.
- . "Grammar and Logic in Syriac (and Arabic)." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 58, no. 1 (2013): 101-20.
- . "Why Were the Syrians Interested in Greek Philosophy?". In *History and Identity in the Late Antique near East*, edited by Philip Wood. Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity, 61-81. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion : Post-Colonial Theory, India and the Mystic East*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Laird, M. "Gregory of Nyssa and the Mysticism of Darkness: A Reconsideration (an Epistemological-Ethical Structuring of the Experience of Divine Union in Christian Literature of Late Antiquity)." *Journal of Religion* 79, no. 4 (Oct 1999): 592-616.
- Lane, George. "An Account of Gregory Bar Hebraeus Abu Al-Faraj and His Relations with the Mongols of Persia." *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999 [2010]): 209-33.
- Lazarus-Yafeh, Hava. *Studies in Al-Ghazzali*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975.
- Liddell, Henry George. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. edited by Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie. 9th ed. 2 vols. Vol. II, Oxford: Clarendon, 1925-1940.
- Lindbeck, George A. *The Nature of Doctrine : Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.

- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Vision of God*. Library of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality. London: Faith Press, 1963.
- Louth, Andrew. *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition : From Plato to Denys*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue : A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed. London: Duckworth, 1985.
- . *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry : Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. New ed. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.
- . *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. "The "End of Metaphysics" as a Possibility." In *Religion after Metaphysics*, edited by Mark A. Wrathall, 166-89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- . *God without Being : Hors-Texte* [Dieu sans l'être.]. Religion and Postmodernism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. *Manufacturing Religion : The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Presence of God : A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.
- McMahon, John M. "Severus Sebokht [Sebokht, Sebukht, Seboht]." In *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, edited by Thomas Hockey, Virginia Trimble, Thomas R Williams, Katherine Bracher, Richard A Jarrell, Jordan D Marché, II, F. Jamil Ragep, Jo Ann Palmeri and Marvin Bolt, 1044-45: Springer New York, 2007.
- Moore, Peter. "Mystical Experience, Mystical Doctrine, Mystical Technique." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 101-31. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- . "Recent Studies of Mysticism: A Critical Survey." *Religion : a Journal of Religion and Religions* 3 (1973): 146-56.
- Nelstrop, Louise, Kevin J. Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi. *Christian Mysticism : An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.
- Nöldeke, Theodor, and John Sutherland Black. *Sketches from Eastern History*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892.
- Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*. 2nd ed.: Oxford U.P, 1950.
- . *Mysticism East and West : A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism*. Translated by Bertha L. Bracey and Richenda C. Payne. Macmillan, 1932.
- Payne Smith, R., and Jessie Payne Smith. *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary : Founded Upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1903.
- Penner, Hans H. "The Mystical Illusion." In *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 89-116. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Peters, F.E. "The Origins of Islamic Platonism: The School Tradition." In *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, edited by Parviz Morewedge. Studies in Islamic Philosophy and Science, 14-45. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.
- Prince, Brainerd. "Aurobindo's Integralism : Study of Religion and the Hermeneutics of Tradition." Thesis (Ph.D.), Middlesex University, 2012.
- Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious Experience*. Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1985.
- Reinink, G. J. "'Origenism' in Thirteenth-Century Northern Iraq." In *After Bardaisan : Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity* edited by Han J. W. Drijvers, Alexander Cornelis Klugkist and G. J. Reinink. Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 236-52. Leuven: Peeters, 1999.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics : Writings and Lectures, Volume 2* [Écrits et conférences. 2. Herméneutique.]. Translated by David Pellauer. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.

- . "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology." In *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, edited by John B. Thompson, 63-100. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- . "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as Text." In *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, edited by John B. Thompson, 197-221. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- . "The Task of Hermeneutics." In *Hermeneutics & the Human Sciences*, edited by John B. Thompson, 43-62. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- . *Time and Narrative* [Temps et récit.]. Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer. 3 vols Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Rothberg, Donald. "Contemporary Epistemology and the Study of Mysticism." In *The Problem of Pure Consciousness : Mysticism and Philosophy*, edited by Robert K. C. Forman, 163-210. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Samir, Samir Khalil, S.J. "Cheminement Mystique d'Ibn al-'Ibri (1226-1286)." *Proche-Orient Chretien* 37 (1987): 71-89.
- . "Un Récit Autobiographique d'Ibn al-'Ibri." *Dirāsāt* 15 (1988): 15-51.
- Sandford, Stella. *The Metaphysics of Love : Gender and Transcendence in Levinas*. London: The Athlone Press, 2000.
- Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith* [in English translation of the 2nd German edition.]. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928.
- . *On Religion : Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* [Über die Religion.]. Translated by Richard Crouter. Texts in German Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. "The Making of Modern Mysticism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (2003): 273-302.
- Schuon, Frithjof. *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*. London: World of Islam Festival Publishing, 1976.
- . *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*. London: Faber and Faber, 1953.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Francis, and Gordon D. Kaufman. "God." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 136-59. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Sells, Michael Anthony. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Sharf, Robert H. "Experience." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 94-116. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Shear, Jonathan. "On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 319-42.
- Smart, Ninian. "Interpretation and Mystical Experience." *Rel. Stud.* 1, no. 1 (1965): 75-87.
- . "Understanding Religious Experience." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz, 10-21. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Smith, Huston. "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1987): 553-66.
- Smith, Margaret. *Studies in Early Mysticism in the near and Middle East : Being an Account of the Rise and Development of Early Christian Mysticism in the near and Middle East up to the Seventh Century, and of the Subsequent Development of Mysticism in Islam Known as Sufism, Together with Some Account of the Relationship between Early Christian Mysticism and the Earliest Form of Islamic Mysticism*. London: Sheldon Press, 1931.
- Sokoloff, Michael. *A Syriac Lexicon : A Translation from the Latin : Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns ; Piscataway, 2009.
- Staal, Frits. *Exploring Mysticism : A Methodological Essay*. Berkeley Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 1975.
- Stace, W. T. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. London: Macmillan, 1960.

- Stewart, Columba. "Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions." *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (2011): 263-75.
- . "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 173-204.
- Takahashi, Hidemi. *Barhebraeus : A Bio-Bibliography*. 1st Gorgias Press ed. Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2005.
- . "Between Greek and Arabic: The Sciences in Syriac from Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus." In *Transmission of Sciences : Greek, Syriac, Arabic and Latin*, edited by Haruo Kobayashi and Mizue Kato, 16-39. Tokyo: Joint Usage/Research Center for Islamic Area Studies, Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University (WIAS), 2010.
- . "Edition of the Syriac Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus. With a Preliminary Report on the Edition of the Book of Heaven and the World and the Book of Generation and Corruption of the Cream of Wisdom." In *The Letter before the Spirit : The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, edited by Aafke M. I. van Oppenraaij and Resianne Fontaine. Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 0927-4103, 109-30. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- . "The Influence of Al-Ghazālī on the Juridical, Theological and Philosophical Works of Barhebraeus." In *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī*. Ohio State University, 2011.
- . "The Mathematical Sciences in Syriac: From Sergius of Resh-'Aina and Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus and Patriarch Ni'matallah." *Annals of Science* 68, no. 4 (2011): 477-91.
- . "The Poems of Barhebraeus: A Preliminary Concordance." *Христианский Восток NS* 6 [12] (2013): 78-139.
- . "The Reception of Ibn Sīnā in Syriac the Case of Gregory Barhebraeus." Paper presented at the Before and after Avicenna : proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group, Yale University, 2001.
- . "Simeon of Qal'a Rumaita, Patriarch Philoxenus Nemrod and Bar 'Ebroyo." *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001 [2010]): 45-91.
- Tannous, Jack. "You Are What You Read: Qenneshre and the Miaphysite Church in the Seventh Century." In *History and Identity in the Late Antique near East*, edited by Philip Wood. Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity, 83-102. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Taylor, David G. K. "L'importance des Pères de L'eglise dans L'oeuvre Spéculative de Barhebraeus." *Parole de l'Orient* 33 (2008): 63-85.
- Teule, Herman. "Barhebraeus." In *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History. Volume 4, (1200-1350)*, edited by David Thomas, Alexander Mallett and Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala. History of Christian-Muslim Relations, 588-609. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2012.
- . "Barhebraeus' Ethicon, Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā." *Islamocristiana* 18 (1992): 73-86.
- . "Christian Spiritual Sources in the Ethicon of Barhebraeus." *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 60 (2008): 333-54.
- . "Gregory Barhebraeus and His Time: The Syrian Renaissance." *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 3 (2003).
- . "The Idea of Perfection in the Spiritual Works of Gregory Barhebraeus." Paper presented at the The Image of the Perfect Christian in Patristic Thought Lviv, Ukraine, 2009.
- . "An Important Concept in Muslim and Christian Mysticism: The Remembrance of God, *dhikr Allah* – '*uhdōnō d-Alōhō*." In *Gotteserlebnis Und Gotteslehre: Christliche Und Islamische Mystik Im Orient*, edited by Martin Tamcke. Göttinger Orientforschungen, Syriaca Reihe 1, 11-23. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010.



- . "It Is Not Right to Call Ourselves Orthodox and the Others Heretics: Ecumenical Attitudes in the Jacobite Church in the Time of the Crusades." Paper presented at the East and West in the Crusader States : Context - Contacts - Confrontations II, Hernen Castle, Netherlands, 1997.
- . "L'amour de Dieu dans L'oeuvre de Bar Ebroyo." Paper presented at the Actes du Colloque VIII Patrimoine syriaque, Antélias-Beyrouth, 2002.
- Treiger, Alexander. "Al-Ghazālī's "Mirror Christology" and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources." *Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (2011): 698-713.
- . *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought : Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*. Culture and Civilization in the Middle East. London ; New York: Routledge, 2012.
- . "Monism and Monotheism in Al-Ghazālī's Mishkāt Al-Anwār." *Journal of Quranic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2007): 1-27.
- Turner, Denys. *Eros and Allegory : Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1995.
- Underhill, Evelyn. *The Essentials of Mysticism : And Other Essays*. London: Dent, 1920.
- . *The Mystic Way : A Psychological Study in Christian Origins*. London: Dent, 1913.
- . *Mysticism : A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*. 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1911.
- . *The Mystics of the Church*. Cambridge: James Clarke, 1975.
- . *Practical Mysticism : A Little Book for Normal People*. Guildford: Eagle, 1991.
- . *The Spiritual Life : Four Broadcast Talks by Evelyn Underhill*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937.
- Van Den Bergh, Simon. "The "Love of God" in Ghazali's Vivification of Theology." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1, no. 4 (1956): 305-21.
- Waardenburg, Jacques. *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion : Aims, Methods, and Theories of Research*. New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999.
- Wainwright, William J. *Mysticism : A Study of Its Nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications*. Brighton: Wayland, 1981.
- Watt, John W. "Commentary and Translation in Syriac Aristotelian Scholarship: Sergius to Baghdad." *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 4 (2010): 28-42.
- . "From Sergius to Mattā: Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius in Syriac Tradition ". In *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity : The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, edited by Josef Lössl and J. W. Watt, 239-58. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011.
- . "Greek Philosophy and Syriac Culture in 'Abbasid Iraq." In *The Christian Heritage of Iraq : Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days*, edited by Erica C. D. Hunter. Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies, 10-37. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009.
- Wear, Sarah Klitenic. "Another Link in the Golden Chain: Aeneas of Gaza and Zacharias Scholasticus on Plotinus *Enn.* 4.3." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013): 145-65.
- Weber, Max. *Economy and Society : An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* [Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.]. Translated by Ephraim Fischoff. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.
- . *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. Translated by Henry A. Finch and Edward A. Shils. New York: Free Press, 1949.
- . *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1993.
- Weeraperuma, Claudia. *Contemplative Prayer in Christianity and Islam*. Delhi: ISPCK, 2003.
- Weltecke, Dorothea. "On the Syriac Orthodox in the Principality of Antioch During the Crusader Period." Paper presented at the East and West in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean I : Antioch from the Byzantine Reconquest until the end of the Crusader Principality, Leuven, 2003.

- . "A Renaissance in Historiography? Patriarch Michael, the Anonymous Chronicle Ad A. 1234, and Bar Ebroyo." In *The Syriac Renaissance*, edited by Herman G. B. Teule, Taufwinkler C. Fortescu, ter Haar Romeny R.B. and J.J. van Ginkel. Eastern Christian Studies, 95-112. Leuven: Peeters, 2010.
- Widengren, G. "Researches in Syrian Mysticism: Mystical Experiences and Spiritual Exercises." *Numen* 8, no. 3 (1961): 161-98.
- Wilks, Marina. "Jacob of Edessa's Use of Greek Philosophy in His Hexaemeron." In *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, edited by R. B. ter Haar Romeny. Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden, 223-38. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science, and Its Relation to Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Zaehner, R. C. *Hindu & Muslim Mysticism*. Oxford: Oneworld by arrangement with the School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994.
- . *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane : An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-Natural Experience*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Zonta, Mauro. "Structure and Sources of Bar-Hebraeus' "Practical Philosophy" in *the Cream of Science*." Paper presented at the Symposium Syriacum VII, Uppsala, 1996.
- . "Syriac, Hebrew and Latin Encyclopedia in the 13th Century: A Comparative Approach to "Medieval Philosophies"." Paper presented at the Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter? = Qu'est-ce que la philosophie au Moyen Âge? = What is Philosophy in the Middle Ages?, Erfurt, 25-30 August 1997.